



Cambridge CUSTOMS Chronicle by Mike Petty

Includes New Year rockets, Plough Monday, May Day, Good Friday skipping, Bonfire Night & Christmas; Ghosts, Witchcraft and Undergraduate customs – Bonfire night, Poppy Day & Rag, Mock Funerals, May Week and Bumps boat burning & Wooden Spoons

This forms a section of 'A Cambridge Chronicle'

c.39: Folk lore and customs

1889 10 25

Death J.W. Skeels, town crier 28 years [Misc.6.4] Ch 25.10.1889 p3

1897 05 01

May Day is the name of a holiday that calls up all sorts of pretty rustic associations. In Cambridge the first day of the merry month is a most unromantic reality. A few small children straggle about the streets with more or less pretentious garlands and a Jack-in-the-Green may occasionally be caught sight of, but beyond this May Day in Cambridge is a memory of the past. In connection with Hobson-street chapel there was a "May morning breakfast" at which there was a large attendance. The room was decorated with flowers and the gathering was a most enjoyable one 97 05 01

1898 01 02

Shortly before the clock of Great St Mary's with deep-toned impressiveness proclaimed the exit of 1897 and the advent of 1898 King's Parade was thronged with people awaiting the fiery messengers sent up year after year by Ald Beck. We have a shrewd suspicion that the unusual sight of letting off rockets at midnight attracted the bulk of the people who visited King's Parade last night. "Beer, beer, glorious beer" chorused a lively portion of the crowd. Precisely upon the stroke of 12 there was a swish and roar in front of the portals of King's and the first rocket soared aloft proclaiming abroad the significant fact that the old year was out. A second rocket heralded in the new year, and after some

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slight ebullition of feeling and a feeble attempt at "Aud lang syne" the crowds dispersed, and the streets resumed their normal state 1898 01 02

1898 05 01 c

The pretty and interesting ceremony of electing and enthroning a May Queen was observed at the Higher Grade School, Eden Street. Teachers and girls had been busy transforming their room into a perfect garden of flowers, and the Royal dais, covered with a green carpet. The retiring Queen (Ethel Norman) having robed and put on a crown of pansies she ascended the throne and abdicated at the end of a very happy reign. May Rossendale was elected the new Queen by a large majority and to the strains of a stately march she appeared, preceded by her bodyguard bearing garlands of flowers with which they made a triumphal arch for her May Majesty's procession. c1898 05 01

1898 05 28

Seven labourers were summoned for "tin kittling" in Great Shelford. PC Chater said they were banging tins and trays, and such things, as well as shouting and yelling at a lady. Two of them had pails half full of tar which they used for burning the woman in effigy. This entertainment continued for about two hours. The woman said: "My husband won't part with his money, and that's why I left him." The magistrate: "What is your husband's name?" - "I don't know what his name is. I never took the trouble to remember his nasty name". Defendants were fined 2s.6d each CDN 1898 05 28

1899 01 02

As 12 o'clock draws near on New Year's Eve in Cambridge the interest of the crowd is directed towards the House of Alderman Deck. For many years he has made himself responsible for a display of rockets on King's Parade as the Old Year gives place to the New; and he is not going to disappoint his fellow townspeople tonight. Just a few minutes before twelve he leaves his house and sets up the stand from which two rockets are to be fired on the causeway in front of the gates of King's College. While the expectant crowd eagerly looks on, he lights a fuse and just on the first stroke of twelve the first rocket, that in honour of the Old Year, is set off. It has hardly completed its flight when another rocket, that in honour of the New Year, shoots up into the sky 1899 01 02

1899 02 17

Yesterday afternoon the attention was attracted by what seemed to be an imposing funeral procession. But this was no ordinary funeral for instead of the usual hearse an open landau led the way and this was occupied by three young men who wore "the trappings of woe" very lightly. Following were nearly a score of hansoms. It is alleged that at the end of last term a student of Queens' college "ragged" a couple of Freshmen's rooms. The matter was reported to the University authorities who came to the conclusion he should be sent down for a year. His friends resolved to show their disapproval. Before the train left the company whistled the "Dead March" and it left amid ringing cheers - 1899 02 17

1899 08 09

Once a year the good feeling existing at Pembroke College between members of the colleges and the servants is given expression to. In recent years, largely owing to the efforts of Mr A. Chapman, the butler, undergraduates and servants have united in a festive gathering in the Long Vacation, and it has now assumed the aspect of an annual affair. During the day a cricket match took place, the servants played in the ordinary way, while the collegians used broomsticks as bats. Dinner in hall followed and after this came a concert *al fresco* - 1899 08 09

1900

1900 01 01

Farewell to 1899 and welcome to 1900 were symbolised by the two rockets that were sent up from King's Parade just before the stroke of 12 on New Year's Eve. The custom of discharging rockets has been religiously observed since 1825 by the Deck family and it is now one of the established institutions of Cambridge life and a much-looked-for feature of the season's festivities CDN 1900 01 01

1900 05 01

For several years past the 1st of May has been observed at the Eden Street Higher Grade School, Cambridge, by a ceremony which is at once attractive and imposing. The scholars assemble in costumes suitable to the best traditions of the sunny month and elect one of their number as Queen for the year. It is a happy survival of May Day festivities, which it is hoped will be perpetuated. Queen Kate and her retinue walked to the throne which was bright with a profusion of spring flowers. The children voted for the new Queen and Ellie Fisher was elected. She was crowned with a wreath of white flowers and saluted with a sisterly kiss by the dowager Queen
CDN 1900 05 01

1900 05 01

It is a matter of regret that the celebration of May Day has been so largely discontinued. The Maypole has to a large extent disappeared. It was a praiseworthy custom, and its associations were fragrant of rustic purity, but the Maypole has gone the way of the spinning jenny. Children still gather wild flowers on May Day, but the garlands that one sees have too much of the coloured paper and ribbon brought from the draper in their composition
CDN 1900 05 01

1900 10 18

Cambridge town council considered the position of town crier. Mr Campkin said the office was a relic of Bumbledon and could well be dispensed with. They had outlived the town crier as they had the Bedell. Alderman Spalding thought it a great pity to get rid of these old offices. The crier preceded the Mayor to church five times a year, went to meet the judges three times, attending the quarter sessions and licensing sessions and made in all sixteen appearances during the year. The salary was £20 per annum
CDN 1900 10 18

1900 12 20

Cambridge Town Council invited applications for the post of Town Crier, at a salary of £20 per annum, with allowance for delivering and posting handbills, and uniforms to be provided. The crier might be a little out of date, but he was a picturesque figure. Three candidates were interviewed and asked to read one of the Proclamations used at Midsummer Fair. The committee strongly recommended that Henry James Thompson, of Perowne Street, be elected
CDN 1900 12 20

1901 01 01

All over the country people keep up the practice of watching the Old Year out and the New Year in, but Cambridge is probably unique in the sending up of rockets. Mr Alderman Deck has religiously observed the practice inaugurated by his father and the townspeople are grateful to him for it. Hundreds of people gathered on King's Parade. The two rockets were placed in a crate and just as King's clock was striking the midnight hour the venerable Alderman applied a light to one of the rockets and with its flight was symbolised the flight of 1900. A few moments later the second rocket was sent up, heralding the birth of the New Year and the New Century
01 01 01

1901 06 18

A large number witnessed the quaint custom of the presentation of the wooden spoon to the last man in the University Mathematical Tripos. This year two candidates were bracketed at the bottom of the list and both gentlemen received large spoons emblazoned and trimmed with their college colours. The spoons were lowered down to their owners from the gallery in the Senate House amid much interest. Mess Crisp & Co of King's Parade, Cambridge, again supplied the spoons, which were artistically painted and decorated. Mr D. Buchanan, who comes from South Africa, has had an additional spoon presented to him by his South African friends, with the arms and coloured ribbons of Cape Colony
CDN 1901 06 18

1902 01 01

The one event in Cambridge on New Year's Eve that rises superior to all others is the midnight ceremony on King's Parade, where for many years past the public have assembled to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new, in a manner that obtains in a few other towns in the Kingdom. There was little except the associations of the ceremony to tempt hundreds of people to make a

midnight journey. The space in front of Alderman Deck's house, facing King's College was densely packed and shortly before 12 o'clock the first rocket ascended and about a minute later the second followed. A few illuminative fireworks were discharged near the church and King's Parade resumed its normal appearance by 12.15 CDN 1902 01 01

1902 05 01

Old English customs are, unhappily, dying out slowly but surely. Even the romantic revels which formerly attached to May Day have to a large extent disappeared and but little remains to mark what was an important day in the calendar. May Day is essentially a day for youthful jubilation and in one place in Cambridge is at least observed as such. Scholars at Eden Street Higher Grade Schools annually take part in a quaintly pretty ceremony of choosing a May Queen. Queen Nellie – last year's queen was escorted to her throne and formally abdicated. Votes were taken and it was announced that Miss Daisy Coulson had been elected and she was crowned with a crown of roses CDN 1902 05 01

1903 01 01

Young men and matrons, old men and children, gathered on King's Parade, Cambridge, at midnight to speed the dying year and welcome the new. Everyone was waiting for Alderman Deck who left his house a few minutes before the hour, carrying the rockets, to see the flight of which so many people flock to the Parade. Standing in front of King's gate the venerable alderman lighted the rockets and the crowds broke into hearty cheers. 03 01 01

1903 04 11

Itinerant vendors of the delicacy inseparable from Good Friday awakened citizens to the fact that a public holiday was at hand. While the majority of householders were still sleeping peacefully, unmusical voices in the streets below broke the stillness of the morning with offers to sell 'two a penny' and a proportionate number for 'tup-pence' in a sing-song for which three notes of the scale provided the tune. All modes of traction were utilised by holiday-makers, affording evidence of the growing popularity of the motor. Dusty and noisy they may be, but that they continue to grow more popular there can be no doubt and motorists comprised no mean section of the Good Friday road traffic. 03 04 11

1903 02 03

A Fulbourn wood dealer claimed his horse had been bewitched and conducted an experiment to see who had bewitched it. He took two bottles to the blacksmith's shop and filled them with nails and pieces of hoof from the floor, then bought some pins and needles. At midnight he put water in a saucepan and boiled it with the parings of hoofs nails, pins and needles in. He sat quite in the dark. At last somebody came to the door but he was so frightened he blundered off upstairs. The magistrates attributed the condition of the horse to starvation rather than the evil eye and imposed a heavy fine. It is almost incredible that such fooleries should be believed 03 02 03

1903 02 04

The most famous wise woman in the fens lives in the town of Cambridge itself. On market days farmers and labourers and servants come to seek her advice, cross her hand with silver and go away with spells for love and marriage, for the cure of all kinds of ills and good luck in cattle-dealing. Another famous Wise Woman lives in a cottage in a village near Newmarket. She does a good business in spells and charms, from wart-curing to love philtres. She has cured thousands of warts by a process of rubbing the root of the dandelion plant on the hard skin to the accompaniment of some incantation gibberish. On stormy nights she is still fondly believed to go for midnight rides on a broomstick. 03 02 04

1904 01 01

For a span of seventy-odd years Cambridge has had a rallying point from which to speed the Old and welcome the New Year. The venerable Alderman Deck has sent two coloured rockets skyward and attracted a portion of the population to King's Parade. For the first time a similar event took place at Old Chesterton when his son ignited the fireworks close to the Horse Grind ferry. But it was not

known that a new ceremony would take place and not a single resident left his abode to witness the rockets' flight 04 01 01

1904 01 15

Plough Monday dancers absent [1.25]

1904 01 26

Cambridge magistrates said the custom of sending round for 'Christmas Boxes' was a bad one and liable to be greatly abused. They heard how a groom from Castle Street had obtained a shilling from the cashier at Hallack and Bond's shop after claiming that he was an ostler at the Carrier's Arms. He also tricked Eaden Lilley's into giving him a similar sum. No less than 11 similar charges could have been made against the prisoner who was sentenced to seven days hard labour. 04 01 26

1904 04 02

On Good Friday Cambridge residents now expect their repose during the early hours of the morning to be broken by the appropriately mournful cries of the purveyors of the stodgy hot cross bun. As early as half-past four in the centre of the town the 'Two-a-penny, four-for-tuppence', pitched for the most part in a minor key, commences and continues without intermission until the disturbed sleeper in sheer desperation gives up attempted repose and descends to breakfast, at which meal the Good Friday bun is usually of more ornament than use. The custom of taking a supply of the buns shows little decline & manufacturers say there is still a good demand. As far as the weather was concerned, after the snowstorm, hail-storms and rain of Thursday, it was a pleasant surprise, but amusements were restricted by the high wind. Easter is the commencement of the season for pleasure patrons of the wheel, but few cared to face the grind of many miles in the teeth of such strong currents and the roads were but little 04 04 02

1904 06 10

Procession of boats to be buried [2.8]

1904 11 26

The bedmaker is an institution. Without her the University would be sadly disorganised. Now The Granta has been conducting a bedmakers competition which Mrs Jacob of Magdalene has won. She was born in 1829 and has served the college for 62 years. Mrs Hills of St Johns has a record of continuous service since 1839 while Mrs Nichols has served 28 years at Corpus with 11 at Peterhouse before that. But several ladies entirely declined to take the contest seriously, one saying she had read in The Granta 'articles which no gentleman could possibly have written' 1904 11 26

1904 12 24

Show Night one Christmas custom still lamented; all Cambridge and his wife used to turn into the streets on Show Night when every shopkeeper did his best to make a display of his wares and catch the public eye by some novel form of window dressing. The chief objects of attention were the butchers and poulterers shops where the carcasses of prize beasts and prize poultry were exhibited in prestigious quantities, meanwhile the proprietors dispensed hospitality to their customers in their private offices or parlours ... In their endeavours to beat one another the butchers killed more meat than they could get rid of ... then sentimentality came on the scene - felt it barbarous 'unworthy of nineteenth-century civilisation' so died out ... talk of advisability of reviving it next year 04 12 24 [4]

1904 12 24

Last term in the small hours of the morning an undergraduate in the old part of Corpus Christi College saw something of a supernatural appearance. It so unnerved him he became quite ill; he refused to continue to occupy the room and moved to another staircase. Naturally the college authorities deemed it desirable to prevent the story from gaining publicity and until now have succeeded in suppressing the circumstances. But now the harrowing and gruesome facts have leaked out and the recent visitation of 'something' to the undergraduate is beyond dispute. 04 12 24 [1.15,2.10]

1905 03 11

Sultan of Zanzibar hoax (follows article in TT about Shah of Persia visit 1873) [2.13]

1905 04 08

The alleged appearance of an apparition at Corpus College is recorded in 'The Occult Review'. It describes attempts to exorcise the spirit who says he is Thomas Harding and killed himself in the rooms in 1707. It is a known fact that a former Master, Dr Butts, hanged himself in these rooms but of Harding nothing has yet been found. There are mice in the rooms but it would be difficult for any noise they make to be mistaken for footsteps, nor could they shake a wash-stand to and fro. 05 04 08f-j

1905 06 19

A sensational report in the London papers that 'the body a woman upon whose body a variety of curious tattoo designs was found was discovered in the river at Cambridge' actually refers to a tragedy at Chatteris a fortnight ago. Two women of the tramp class were pulled from the river. One had tattoos of the crucifixion on her chest, a soldier, sailor and flags on her right arm and a fully-rigged ship, English and American flags, the letter M and a woman in tights on her left. Her left leg had a representation of a Highlander playing bagpipes 05 06 19a

1905 07 08

Mr Prevett, the clever local Punch and Judy man was performing at a garden party near Cottenham and demonstrating the unhappy relations between Punch and his spouse with much vigour. At the conclusion of the show he was accosted by a lady who protested his manipulation of the dolls was too brutal and would have a demoralising effect on the poor innocent rustics. A short time after the lady married, and quite recently was fined for assaulting her husband with a garden rake! 05 07 08a

1906

St John Ascension Day custom "introduced 10 years ago" (1916) [1.4]

1906 01 01

The old custom of assembling on King's Parade to witness the death of the old year and the birth of the new, as signalized by the discharge of a couple of rockets, was again observed by a large number of the inhabitants of Cambridge. The crowd was in a happy frame of mind but there was nothing to complain of in their behaviour. A few seconds before midnight one rocket soared skywards to the accompaniment of cheers. Shortly afterwards 1906 was heralded by a second. The custom, which was initiated by the late Mr Deck, has now reached its 80th anniversary. 06 01 01a

1906 04 14

'Hare scramble and bottle-kicking' custom, Hallaton – 06 04 14

1906 06 12

A crowd of dons and undergraduates congregated in the Senate House to learn who had gained the coveted distinction of Senior Wrangler but those who were expected to obtain good positions awaited in the seclusion of their rooms the news brought by friends. The examiners stood in the gallery holding the fateful papers in their hands and announced that Mr A.T. Rajan, an Indian student, and Mr C.J. Sewell, both of Trinity, were bracketed as Senior Wranglers. When the order of merit in printed form came fluttering down from the gallery the customary wild scramble for the sheets ensued. 06 06 12

1906 06 19

At the Senate House two Wooden Spoonists received their degrees. H.R. Bell and W.Crouch, both of Selwyn, were bracketed last in the Mathematical Tripos and each was presented with a wooden spoon. Years ago this was a shovel with the college arms hastily painted on the bowl. Now it has become a thing of beauty, a trophy handsomely decorated which would not be out of place in the most artistic study. They were lowered on strings from the gallery and each recipient was handed a pair of garden

shears with which he cut the string, bravely shouldered the spoon and marched out accompanied by a perfect tornado of cheers. 06 06 19a & b

1906 08 25

Newmarket Road was the scene of a demonstration which proves that whatever the morality of a district individually, collectively it is on the side of strict morality. The people who incurred the displeasure of the neighbourhood were the objects of a considerable amount of hustling in the streets and a crowd gathered in front of their house beating tin kettles and similar utensils. 06 08 25a

1906 11 19

For many years it has been the custom for men employed in the various bakery businesses in Cambridge to hold an annual supper known as the Bakers' Clem, provided through the generosity of the master bakers and millers. This year 70 men and boys sat down to a substantial meal at the Star Tap, Newmarket Road after which songs were sung. 06 11 19

1906 12 29

Christmas bathing in the river needs a Spartan spirit and a robust constitution. But in Cambridge sufficient men enjoy a jovial gathering at the Town Bathing Sheds every Christmas morning. With the mercury hovering above freezing point, water in dykes coated with ice and a keen wind blowing across the Fen, about 30 bold spirits plunged in and one swam to the Leys School. When he emerged from the water his skin had a bright red hue, but he was perfectly happy. 06 12 29b

1907 01 01

The Cambridge custom of ushering in the New Year by the discharge of rockets from King's Parade has rarely been observed under more favourable conditions and a good crowd congregated near King's gate where a wooden stand had been erected. The Chief of the Fire Brigade and the Chief Constable stood by with a number of 'blue lights' spluttering in their hands ready to fire the symbols of farewell and welcome. 07 01 01

1907 01 08

For many years a weird figure, clad in a red chintz dress, has haunted a farmhouse on the Thorney estate in the fens. During the creepy hours of the night it appeared in one particular bedroom and pointed a long, lean finger to a roof. Sometimes it made a rattling noise. Then it vanished. The house was long occupied by the Caves, a noted fen family. Now a new tenant investigating the beams above the room has found secreted there the will of John Caves, made in 1797, relating to an estate worth about £10,000. Probably the mystic lady's perambulations will now cease 07 01 08

1907 01 12

Mrs Verrall, wife of a Fellow of Trinity, first attempted to obtain automatic phenomena by means of the planchette but without success. She then tried automatic writing. Seating herself before a sheet of paper she began writing rapidly although it was dark and could not see what she wrote. The writings have been in Latin and sometimes Greek but the phraseology is medieval. A good many other Cambridge people are interesting themselves in such phenomena and there was previously a branch of the Psychical Research Society in the town. 07 01 12 & 12a

1907 02 01

Only members of the University in academic dress are admitted to the Senate House to vote on the abolition of the Senior Wranglership. But one voter managed to elude the vigilance of the janitors and outraged the proprieties by stalking up to the barrier in a light 'dust' coat, swinging his cloth cap in hand. The situation was explained to him and after a hasty retreat he reappeared in the decorous black garment. 07 02 01a

1907 02 04

The doom of the Senior Wrangler has been sealed, and after 1909 that world renowned and historic personage will be as extinct as the Dodo. It is impossible not to feel regret for his passing. He has

been so intimately associated with Cambridge as to have become a sort of trademark by which the University is known. But the tendency of modern education is towards specialisation and a University that failed to keep abreast of the times would soon be in decline. 07 02 04

1907 06 08

The boat procession used to be the most popular of the May Week gaieties. The brilliant blazers of the collegeians, the varied colours of the ladies' charming costumes, the prettily adorned boats together with the enlivening strains of an excellent band all combined to make a scene of colour and animation. The gathering fell through owing to the apathy of the boating men who objected to dressing up to be looked at. But it is a great pity 07 06 08a

1907 06 18

The scene in the Senate House was very tame and it was not until the presentation of the wooden spoons to the last Wrangler that there was any fun at all. This year three men were bracketed for last place. The original wooden spoon, about 30 years ago, grew into a malt shovel with the man's college arms upon it, but this year they were more elaborately decorated than ever and are quite works of art, beautifully adorned from bowl to handle. 07 06 18 & a

1907 09 05

A family has fled a two room, one up and one down, cottage in the parish of St Andrew-the-Less because of a supernatural visitation. Mysterious knockings come from beneath a truckle bed in which an eight-year old, named Rose, sleeps with another girl. People have tried to reproduce the noise by shaking the bed, stamping on the floor and striking the wall. The floorboards have also been taken up without result. Hard-headed men who pooh-poohed the story waited outside and distinctly heard the noises which only happen when Rose is in the bed, asleep. 07 09 05 & a.

1907 09 07

The Cambridge 'ghost' has declined further manifestations for the delectation of hundreds of curious persons who, having discovered its situation, throng the narrow thoroughfare at all hours up to midnight. Neighbours discuss little else: Rose the girl at the centre of the disturbance, is the offspring of a former marriage, her mother having been married a second time. The theory is that the spirit of her deceased father is endeavouring to communicate with her, for monetary advantage. Two CDN reporters waited for hours at the 'haunted cottage' with all the paraphernalia for bogus-spook-laying. News of the investigation had leaked out and the street was filled with men, women and children whose remarks were overheard by those behind the drawn blinds. Some agreed they were foolhardy and a bottle of brandy was a necessary item – but a spook-hunter is a teetotaller if he is wise. As the hours progressed the crowds melted away before the persuasions of the police. News reporters in the Cambridge 'haunted house' heard a 'thump-thump-thump' repeated twice. Had the spook obliged? Not a bit of it – the sound came from next door. Either the neighbour found a spot which required hammering or he thought he would reward the investigators with something to investigate. No noises have ever occurred after eleven o'clock so the pair packed up their paraphernalia and left without having heard anything more ghostly than the scratching of rats and mice. But outside the excitement remains as real as ever 07 09 07 & a

1907 09 30

Many recall the 'Knocking Ghost of Barton' when a succession of thumps were heard in a farmhouse and many a skilled ghost-layer were at their wits' end for an explanation. The real reason was hit upon by accident. Near at hand was a stable and beneath the floor was a disused iron pipe. When the horse kicked the sound was communicated to the house but so muffled and mysterious that no other cause than the supernatural was supposed. The Barton ghost had a good run before being run to earth. 07 09 30a

1907 11 26

A 'mock funeral' saw a procession of 100 cabs boarded by undergraduates who scrambled to the roof of the vehicles for the journey to the railway station. The cabbies had decorated their whips with

pieces of crepe and ‘mourners’ with mouth organs and a miniature bagpipes played hideous music. The ‘deceased’ was ‘sent down’ for being out of Caius College after midnight – he had gone to London but his car had broken down. 07 11 26

1907 12 14

There is considerable perturbation in regard to the application of the Prevention of Corruption Act to the time-honoured custom of giving and receiving Christmas boxes. The house-wife may still give her maid a half-crown upon Christmas morning, the master may have the satisfaction of a grin from his man upon receipt of a similar sum, the postman may still be rewarded with his Yuletide trifle. But beyond Christmas boxes of this character is it not safe to go. 07 12 14b

1908 04 17

Good Friday celebrations – 08 04 17

1908 06 05

There has been an Alpine fever amongst undergraduates, finding a vent in climbing trees along the Backs. The wireless telegraphy station on the Huntingdon Road has been the site of the latest exploit. This is a pole over 200 feet in height which receives messages from Cumnor Hill near Oxford. Two undergraduates merrily commenced the ascent by means of the metal spikes driven in at convenient intervals and managed to reach the top. But the return voyage was not so easily accomplished and they reached terra firma with a distinct sigh of relief. It is a matter for common wonder what object will next receive the attention of this strange species. CWN 08 06 05 p5

1908 08 22

A wise woman living in a village near Newmarket does a good business in spells and charms, from wart curing to love philtres. She has cured thousands of warts by rubbing the root of a dandelion on the hard skin to the accompaniment of some incantation gibberish. On stormy nights she is still fondly believed by many people to go for midnight rides on a broomstick – or so claims a London paper hard up for copy during the silly season. CWN 08 08 22 p5

1908 09 02

Death of Arthur Deck, New Year ceremony: two rockets set off as King’s clock struck the hour; took punch in Deck’s back parlour [1.1]

1908 11 20

Frederick Myers was well known in Cambridge during his lifetime and, being interested in spiritualism, promised that if communication between the dead and the mind of the earthly were at all possible he would get in touch with his friends on earth. Now Mrs Henry Sidgwick, president of the Psychical Research Society, claims to have established communication through a system of automatic cross-correspondence. CWN 08 11 20

1909

Notes Harriet Evans 65, eccentric man hater, walked streets with bat on each arm & thick white veil [Misc.6.5]

1909 05 21

The last senior wrangler – list of competitors – 09 05 21

1909 05 28

Empire Day celebrations – 09 05 28

1909 06 18

Last senior wrangler – historic sketch – 09 06 18

1909 12 31

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The Costermongers Boxing Day Marathon race was run between East Road and Bottisham and back. It is open to men who earn their living by hawking and the fact that 17 came forward with their barrows in such unfavourable conditions says a good deal for their hardiness.. Soon mud began to bespatter the runners. Tom Nunn took the lead in the outward journey but was finally beaten by Sam George CWN 09 12 31

1910

Death George Randell lived Honey Hill, blind man sold matches on street corners, so tall coffin made seven feet long [Misc.6.6]

1910 01 07

Crowds of several hundred people thronged King's Parade awaiting the hour of midnight when they would bid farewell to the old year and welcome in the new by the discharge of rockets. This tradition has been carried on by the well-known family of Deck for 84 years. To while away the time sundry vocalists started choruses of popular tunes until the solemn hour drew near and a cheer was raised when the rockets were brought out and fixed in readiness in the gateway of King's College. As the clock struck 12 the first rocket went up straight and true and as the glare of the firework died away the bells of Great St Mary's struck up a merry peal and toasts were drunk. 10 01 07

1910 02 04

An old Cambridgeshire custom says that an inhabitant who transgresses the conventions shall be accorded a 'tin-kettling'. One took place at Fen Ditton where 200 people assembled outside the house of a couple, many provided with tin-kettles, tin-pans and whistles. What noise could not be made by thumping these with pieces of wood was contributed by the yelling of many voices. Popular songs were also bawled out and a special chorus composed for the occasion was sung to the accompaniment of much booing. This continued for an hour. Then effigies of the offending parties were carried high above the heads of the jeering crowd and set on fire in the middle of the roadway while the crowd danced round, jeering and shouting the names of the couple. 10 02 04h

1910 02 18

Dr R. Vaughan Williams lectured on 'The Folk Songs of East Anglia' and the enjoyment was enhanced by Mr J. Steuart Wilson of King's College who gave expressive renderings of a number of Old English ballads. Vaughan Williams had discovered the early folk ballad 'Geordie' at Fen Ditton but whether there was a great deal more to be found he did not know. At Fowlmere the Rev Campbell Yorke had got the 'May Day Song' from an old gentleman who rejoiced in the name of 'Hoppy' who preferred to do odd jobs and sleep in sheds and outhouses. He often started the first verse of a song with an entirely different tune and only got into the right swing at the end. 10 02 18 & a

1910 06 17

Saturday's bump suppers proved exceptionally popular. It is customary for bonfires to be held in college courts and the frequent discharge of fireworks kept the fun flowing until the early hours. Jesus, who retained their position as head of the river, held a magnificent bonfire on the Close. A large crowd attracted by an enormous pile of old boxes dumped near the tennis courts, assembled in anticipation of fun before the pile was set ablaze by firing Roman candles into the heart of the inflammable mass. 10 06 17

1910 06 17

One of the biggest mock funerals for many years resulted as a difference of opinion between the authorities of Emmanuel and several junior members of the college as to the proper conduct of a 'bump supper' after which they had lit a bonfire on the lawn in the front court. Some ten undergraduates in their third year were rusticated for a week. A string of hansom cabs appeared at the gates, the 'corpses' clambered on to the roofs and mourners in evening dress and wearing old silk hats swathed with crape accompanied them to the station. 10 06 17a

1910 09 23

A man told the court that he earned £1 a week playing a street organ. It had cost him £18 10s.6d, he'd spent £5 for new tunes, twelve shillings on a new wheel and three-and-six on tuning. A motor car had run into the back of it, knocking it over and causing considerable damage. A four-year old boy who had been in the shafts was knocked over and his hands were cut. There was nobody in Cambridge who understood the instrument and it would have to go to London to be repaired. Repairs would cost at least £3. He had another organ which his son took out. He was awarded £5 for damage to the machine and £3 for loss of earnings. 10 09 23 c & d

1910 11 11

An undergraduate was fined for assaulting a policeman on Guy Fawkes night. A considerable amount of damage had been done, hoarding demolished, gas lamps broken, the railway station raided and milk churns overturned. The most serious incident occurred at Jesus Sluice footbridge where a battle royal took place between members of the County Constabulary and a large party of undergraduates and town roughs. They stoned the police, all of whom were hit, and PC Johnson was struck on the forehead by a piece of board and rendered unconscious. Only the arrival of police reinforcements had averted further trouble. 10 11 11 & a

1911 01 13

The observance of Plough Monday in Willingham has degenerated into parties of boys calling at houses and asking for coppers. This year an old custom has been revived. A party of young men, wearing top hats decorated with ribbons and carrying whips dragged a plough round the village. On their way they met an old ploughman and on his declining to assist them financially, they harnessed him to the plough and he drew it for some distance. He was soon released but not before he had afforded much amusement to the onlookers and the young men - 11 01 13j

1911 03 10

Mock funeral. At the head of the funeral procession was a hansom. Seats on the top with legs dangling over the side, was the undertaker. His mournful calling seemed to have cast a settled gloom over his countenance. His eyes were mournful and sad, and his clothing was of the deepest black, save for his socks (he wore no shoes), which were of the brightest scarlet. In his hand he waved a long whip (an emblem of his mournful trade), with a bright handkerchief to match his wonderful socks tied to it. Behind the hearse were nine carriages filled with loudly lamenting mourners – extract from a report of a 'Mock Funeral' for an undergraduate sent down from university 11 03 10b

1911 04 15

Hot cross bun seller shouting wares 5.30 am, then 2 more [3.4]

1911 05 19

In a little side passage in King Street a barrel organ was draped with black and mauve as hansoms, taxis and growlers arrived in their dozens. The coffin was covered with crepe surmounted by cap and gown while plumes barely concealed the lines of an express delivery van in which sat the 'corpse' smartly dressed in grey suit and felt bowler. There were about 100 horses and motor vehicles in the procession to the station where the tops of the railway carriages were filled with figures clad in varying garb from pyjamas and rowing shorts to mourning suits and dress suits. It was the most imposing mock funeral ever seen in Cambridge 11 05 19d & e

1911 09 15

'Antiquary' article on Cambridge bygones – 11 09 15 & a

1912 01 05

New Year welcomed by rockets – 12 01 05c

1912 01 26

On Plough Monday it was the custom at Bottisham for ploughboys to have half a gallon of beer at each of the five public houses. Police found two of them drunk in the road. One had collided with a

wall and could not get up; he was taken home in a wheelbarrow. The landlord of the Swan Inn said he'd only supplied them with beer. But his wife said she'd served the men with whisky that farmer Woollard had paid for. He confirmed that he'd put sixpence in the ploughboys' box and treated them to whisky. He would be surprised to find men sober who had visited at the public houses in the village. But they were sober when they left. 12 01 26 & a

1912 02 02

Ghostly rappings on the back door of a cottage at Tydd-street, St Mary, a village near Wisbech are causing great excitement. At first the noise was supposed to be the work of a practical joker, but constant watching disproved that theory. The noises occurred between nine in the morning and seven in the evening. On Wednesday fully 100 people assembled round the cottage and the noises were distinctly heard by all. The owner of the cottage has consulted two Wisbech spiritualists and nothing has been heard of the knocking since then. 12 02 02e

1912 03 08

A mock funeral started from the "corpse's" lodging in Lensfield Road. There was a long line of taxis, hansoms and even four-wheelers stretching some distance down Trumpington Street. There was no elaborate "hearse" as in previous funerals: the body was placed quite simply in a hansom bearing the words "Alas! My poor brother" and smoked cigars throughout. His "cabby's" hat was draped with crepe while the majority of the fancifully-dressed mourned wore complimentary black-eyes out of respect for the 'deceased'. There were an extraordinary number of "flappers" – quite stunning flappers some of them were too. One of the best was a suffragette and Mrs Pankhurst also figured in the procession. 12 03 08

1912 10 18

Workmen digging at the rear of a shop in Peas Hill discovered the skeleton of a man and women, lying side by side. Nearby is the site of an old monastery and the assumption is that the remains were found in a former burying-ground. If so it knocks the bottom out of one of the best ghost stories in Cambridge, involving a wealthy banker whose young, beautiful wife took a lover who then disappeared. Half a body was later discovered in excavations at the Bijou Theatre Club's cellars. Now it appears they may all be linked. 12 10 18

1912 11 09

Always complaints on November 5th - heartless & brutal conduct of police, inhuman monsters who dash hither & thither - but what are respectable people doing out [3.1]

1912 12 20

Mr Herbert Reynolds was presented with a street piano purchased following a benefit concert in the Beaconsfield Hall. Many local gentlemen had subscribed to alleviate the misfortune of Reynolds' blindness by giving him a means of an honest livelihood. The piano would prove a boom to him in his affliction and – they hoped – he would always conduct himself as befits an Englishman. The first tune was then played on the instrument which was made by Pasquale and Co and has a round of ten of the latest melodies. An explanatory board is being gratuitously painted and with the collecting-box and the piano cover the outfit is complete. 12 12 20b

1912 12 21

Christmas of 1912 promises to be as happy as any of its predecessors. The complaint of 'low wages and high prices' is heard in many quarters but evidence of material prosperity is afforded by the increased bulk of trade. Cambridge tradesmen have seldom shown such enterprise in regard to the stock exhibited and their reward promises to be forthcoming in the hearty response of shoppers. The football match on the Town grounds on Christmas Day is sure to prove a great attraction and the 'Barnwell Derby' race for costermongers pushing their barrows from Cambridge to Bottisham Swan will take place on Boxing Day 12 12 21c

1912 12 28

Deck stops people smashing bottles after New Year custom [3.2]

1913 02 15

Valentines cards practically died out, some comic ones [3.3]

1913 03 28

The weather was far from ideal for the Easter Holidays. There was the usual crowd of young people engaged in the traditional Good Friday skipping on Parker's Piece until rain drove them away but the football matches attracted large crowds. On Saturday the wind was strong and a very sharp thunderstorm passed over. Sunday saw brilliant sunshine but it was rather too early in the season for much boating and the rough winds of the last few days had rather discouraged cycling. On Easter Monday a good number of people went off by the excursion trains or by motor launch to Clayhithe and bowling was in full swing on Christ's Pieces 13 03 28 p5 CIP

1913 05 02

Perse Morris Men festival Parker's Piece 13 05 02 p12 CIP

1913 11 21

The Fire escape and engine responded to the alarm of a blaze at St John's College where they found a bonfire burning in second court to celebrate the victory of a rower in the Colquhoun Sculls. Fireworks were discharged and a crowd gathered to watch the glare through the chapel windows. Later a fire broke out in a wicker chair in an undergraduate's room. It is thought a spark from the bonfire may have blown through the window, or a lighted cigarette dropped in the chair. 13 11 21 p11 CIP

1914

Cambridge possess one of 4 tattoo artists in England, very decorated, tattooed one of Shackleton's South Pole party [Misc.6.9]

1914 01 02

There were animated scenes along the road between Cambridge and Bottisham on Boxing Day when the annual Costers' Marathon took place. A big crowd saw the 14 competitors start from Abbey Street. They had to travel to Bottisham and back, a distance of 11 miles, pushing a coster's barrow before them. Ben Warren led practically all the way covering the distance to Bottisham rapidly, but facing the wind on the return leg left all competitors severely tired. Most finished and received half-a-crown. 14 01 02c pic 14 01 02d last costermongers race [1.13]

1914 12 25

In accordance with custom the widows of Haddenham made their house-to-house call on St Thomas' Day to receive their contributions. Several years ago there were upwards of 70, this year only 22 made their appearance. The youngest was 30 and the oldest 50. Notwithstanding age the senior old lady managed the tramp through the village with as much vigour as the younger ones. It is gratifying to know that this mark of respect paid to the needy poor has not fallen off 14 12 25

1915 01 01

Costers' Marathon took place on Boxing Day but rain deterred spectators, robbing it of the animated scenes anticipated. Eight competitors with their barrows took part 15 01 01

1915 01 01

The New Year rocket custom did not take place. Mr Arthur Deck did not consider the present was a time for such a function, especially as fireworks were forbidden on November 5th as likely to cause alarm. Again the event might disturb soldiers in the hospital or encourage soldiers to keep late hours. But people sat up to welcome in the New Year and many of the soldiers from the north were seen on the doorsteps of their houses singing "The Miner's Dream of Home". Bugles were to be heard sounding the Last Post and the bells of Great St Mary's Church rang in the year 1915 15 01 01

1915 01 16

Troops billeted Newmarket Rd house find it haunted [3.5]

1915 02 26

Mysterious happenings have been experienced at Argent's Farm near Hempstead. One night a chair, on which stood a sack containing six stone of flour, suddenly leaned forward and deposited its burden on the floor. This happened three times. Next morning all the chairs played similar pranks and their toppling was witnessed by several residents. Two candles on candle sticks also toppled forward and when the candlestick was placed on a window-sill it gave a great jump on to the bed, a yard and a half away. The owner has lived in the house for 50 years and nothing of that kind had previously taken place 15 02 26

1915 04 03

slump in hot cross buns - usually waken 5am by seller 'one a penny, 2 a penny' - but now no 0.5d buns; will go same way as muffin man, few will miss its passing [3.6]

1915 06 11

Mary Macaulay teacher of folk dancing at Folk Dancing Society, enthusiasm died out with coming of the war 15 06 11 p7

1915 12 24

Haddenham St Thomas' Day widows aged from 35 to 90 tramp the village 15 12 24 p3 CIP

1917 05 23

Rogation Sunday.—An old custom in the shape of the blessing of the crops was revived in St. Luke's parish, Cambridge, on Rogation Sunday, when the Vicar (Rev. W. W. Partridge), choir and congregation perambulated local allotments 17 05 23 CIPof

1917 05 30

Empire Day. Empire Day was officially celebrated at Cambridge by the assembling of a large number of schoolchildren on the Market Place, where the Mayor (Lieut.-Col. B. W. Beales) read the King's Proclamation on food rationing, and the children sang a hymn and the National Anthem and raised three hearty cheers for His Majesty 17 05 30 CIPof

1919 04 30

Hot cross buns and new-laid eggs distributed in Fitzroy Street – 19 04 30c

1920 06 02

Christ's College 'ghost' walks; 'Christopher Round' captured and ducked in swimming pool – Ch 20 06 02d

1920 06 23

Graduates play marbles on steps of Senate House – Ch 20 06 23a, photo 23d; TT article) [3.8]

1921

Death Crutchey Newman, boot cleaner Cambridge station [Misc.6.8]

1921

Custom of keeping Saturday nearest Armistice day starts [369]

1922 12 23

New Year rockets for Parkers Piece because hemmed in by building on what formerly open ground Pembroke St; will be 87th time, custom dates back to 1820 but stopped 1914-18 war & after that DORA forbade it [2.25]

1923 01 01

For most people the practice of watching the Old Year out and the New Year in has considerable attraction. It had that attraction for some 700 people when Mr Arthur Deck revived the ancient custom of letting off one rocket for the departing year and one for the New Year. For the first time since 1913-14 when the War put a stop to the practice has the New Year been welcomed in Cambridge in this way. The proceedings were not marked with that liveliness that some of us remembered was evinced on previous occasions, but still the interest taken speaks well for the continuation of the custom. The firing of rockets was started in 1820 by Mr Deck's grandfather 23 01 01

1923 03 29

An eerie story of a puritan maiden who appeared to a visitor in a house near Cambridge is recorded in the "Westminster Gazette". The incidents were recounted by Mr Ames, who besides being psychic herself, is a writer and lecturer on psychic matters. "My daughter's house near Cambridge was an ancient one and on entering it a feeling of strange discomfort overcame me. That night I dreamed that a puritan girl, beautiful and sad, sat at the foot of my bed. The story was laughed at by my family, but strangely the vicar of the place took it quite seriously and by a study of local records was able to establish that the house had been in the possession of a Puritan family 1923 03 29

1925 01 01

As midnight approached a small group of about 200 brave souls gathered on Parkers Piece, huddled together waiting for 1925. Fierce wet gusts swept by, the old year was going down fighting stubbornly. As the hour approached a silence fell upon the crowd. A minute before there was a flash and a whizz and 1924 split into a thousand coloured lights in the sky. As the first chimes of the Catholic church battled with the wind there came another flash, a soaring, roaring trail of light into the sky – 1925 had come 25 01 01

1925 04 11

Good Friday dawned damp and dismal. Parker's Piece was the great gathering place of the merry makers. In accordance with custom many people produced skipping ropes and skipped away to their hearts' content. Old men & maidens, young men & children – likewise grand dames – jumped up and down to "Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper" and similar meaningless jungles. Hawkers of balloons, ices, fruit and sweets had secured "pitches" at the East Road corner and did good business. Ices, yesterday morning – b-r-r-r! 25 04 11

1925 10 17

Something of a new departure is to be made in the outward appearance of the Pro-Pretor and his satellites. Commencing next week he will patrol the streets on foot but minus cap and gown, and the 'bulldogs' will wear some less conspicuous headgear than 'toppers'. It is said that some students will keep their motors outside the town and cycle out to fetch them but should any resort to such expedients they will probably receive an unpleasant surprise 25 10 17

1926 01 01

1925 was sent from among us, and 1926, was ushered in by the century-old custom of firing two rockets on Parker's Piece at midnight. A small band of townsfolk gathered to attend the funeral obsequies of the dying year. At ten minutes before midnight Mr A. Deck arrived with the rockets and the crowd stood in silence. Then the bells of Great St Mary's were drowned out by a mighty rushing noise, a whiz and a bang and 1925 had gone. Then as the first chimes of the Catholic church reached the ear there was a second whiz followed by another loud bang and 1926 was here 26 01 01

1926 11 02

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle presented a "creepy" evening among ectoplasms, spirits, and the like at St Catharine's college, Cambridge. The hall was crowded with an audience of dons and undergraduates to hear the famous novelist talk on "Psychic Experiences". He had postponed an earlier visit as the college was in mourning for its Master & his doctor had ordered him not to come now because of a bad cold. But he had disobeyed, thinking that if for the second time he did not materialise – laughter –

they would imagine he had no objective existence at all. He showed a photograph of the crowd round the Cenotaph on Armistice Day; above a small band of spiritualists hung a vapour comprising faces of young men killed in the war 26 11 02

1927 02 25

“The first marriage according to the new Prayer Book” was solemnised in Cambridge when an undergraduate “bride” and “bridegroom” were joined together in unholy matrimony on King’s Parade. The blushing bride with the bowing bridegroom was preceded by a piper and a clergyman who was wearing “flannel bags” under his surplice and carried a doll’s sunshade. The bride’s dress was a pair of white lace curtains and she carried a large bouquet of Brussels sprouts. The bridegroom wore a dilapidated silk hat and a red nose – and carried a banana. They stepped into a waiting carriage followed by a motley throng of ludicrously attired “relations and friends” 27 02 25

1927 04 23

Why does skipping always take place on Parker’s Piece, Cambridge on Good Friday and Easter Monday? An old man of 83 remembers skipping there as a boy of five or six and his father apparently did so before him. It seems that Good Friday used to be the publican’s “day out” and they used to repair to the Piece for a game of bat and trap, while their youngsters amused themselves with a skipping rope. We don’t hear much about Bat and Trap nowadays but the skipping goes on as of yore. 27 04 23

1927 06 09

Cambridge Undergraduates took upon themselves the duty of opening “Joanna Southcott’s” famous box on the Market Hill. A crowd of mammoth proportions assembled. A melancholy dirge was heard from Petty Cury and there appeared a party of pipers and following them in one of Dale’s lorries came a weird array of 24 “bishops” and a delegation of “Mormons” wearing huge straw sombreros. One “archbishop” proceeded to open the box, producing several layers of red tape, a teddy bear, a pair of old football boots and a number of bananas with which he pelted the crowd. The “rag” was organised to provide funds for the Cambridge Fruiting Campaign to help strawberry pickers in the Wisbech area. 27 06 09

1927 06 26

When the honours degree men were presented to the Vice Chancellor there was distinct evidence of a movement to break down the tradition of wearing evening dress. Many graduates were in morning dress and soon the sight of men walking about the streets of Cambridge at noon in evening dress will be a thing of the past. The old statutes prescribed that recipients of Bachelors’ degrees must appear in black clothes and since the war impecunious undergraduates found their only black suits were their dress clothes. The new statute states that dark clothes must be worn which brings in the lounge suit. The evening dress tradition is not very old and rests on nothing but undergraduates’ customs 27 06 26

1927 12 07

Sir – the death of Mr Alfred Lander has cast quite a gloom over the Sidgwick Avenue – Silver Street bit of Cambridge. For many a year his familiar figure stood in all weathers under his big old tree, sheltered by the wall, generally accompanied by a robin or dog, his special friends. A casual passer-by might suppose he did nothing but stand there holding his broom, but he was a very useful man. To the best of his limited ability he was famous for going messages and taking care of this and that – and all this above and beyond his ‘professional’ work as a crossing-sweeper (the only unofficial one in the town). So afflicted, but such a simple, kindly and cheery soul; accident made him a cripple in his childhood, and life must have been a long struggle but of late things have been brighter again for him – A mourner 27 12 07

1928 01 02

When Mr Arthur Deck fired the second rocket on Parker’s Piece on New Year’s Eve it was his parting shot, for he was performing the ceremony for the last time. A century-old custom, with which three generations of the Deck family have been associated, will fall into abeyance. Before the war the

rockets used to be sent up at the entrance to King's College but in 1913 the stick attached to one of the rockets fell through a glass roof of a college and did appreciable damage so he changed the scene of operations to Parker's Piece. 28 01 02

1928 01 30

The story of the Chesterton ghost has attracted crowds of people to the pathway skirting the Willows and there were quite 200 spook-hunters waiting for something to turn up. Of course nobody takes the story seriously and even children have braved the darkness and the barbed wire fences to join in the hunt. All sorts of practical jokes have been played and one enthusiast sallied forth with a sheet until people started throwing things! Someone said that the ghost was defunct, having been shot by a policeman. But if the spirit doesn't materialise on the Willows it most certainly will in a licensed establishment in the adjoining Cam Road 28 01 30

1928 06 02

Whitsun customs, 28 06 02 p7

1928 12 29

Deck stops New Year custom, no rockets 1929, attendance at Parkers Piece declined [1.5]

1929 02 15

Cambridge is becoming increasingly interested in folk songs and folk dances thanks to the local branch of the English Folk Dance Society. Keith Falconer, a Cambridgeshire man who is making a big name for himself in the singing world, is to perform at St Columba's Hall. A sword dance and Morris jigs are included in the programme CDN c 12.2.1929

1929 12 31

The firing of the rockets on Parker's Piece, which has been a New Year's Eve custom since 1815 is now a thing of the past. The increasing pull of counter-attractions such as dances has seen dwindling attendance at the midnight ceremony and last year Mr Deck came to the conclusion that no useful purpose would be served by carrying on. So another old custom which served its day and generation well has passed away. There has also been a falling off of the Watch Night services, which once drew crowded congregations, but the Ortona Social Club function at the Masonic Hall was a lively function. CDN 31.12.1929

1930

1930 02 24

The successful crews in the Lent bumping races celebrated in traditional manner. Hundreds of excited undergraduates in 'bump supper' costume filled the streets till midnight and over it all flickered the light and smoke of bonfires. Boats were burned amid shouting and bacchanalian merriment at St Catharine's, Selwyn and Emmanuel who for the first time in history had finished head of the river. An 'eight' was sacrificed in the paddock of the college upon a huge pyre. The manoeuvre of getting the boat into the college proved by no means an easy one and traffic was held up as the unwieldy craft, borne on the shoulders of the crews, was shunted into Downing Street before being passed through the narrow gate. At St Catharine's the boat was escorted to the burning by a procession headed by a band of unemployed ex-Servicemen who had been playing on the towing path 30 02 24a

1930 04 17

For years men have beaten carpets on Butt Green and children have used New Square as a camping-out ground. But these ancient customs are soon to pass away with the transfer of the Green to Jesus College, and the construction of a parking place in the Square. 30 04 17

1930 05 26

A mock funeral procession paraded through Cambridge as undergraduates bade farewell to one of their number who had been sent down. It was headed by an old horse-drawn landau in which the

'corpse' sat, his face disguised beneath a war-paint of lipstick. He was joined by various persons who were to officiate at the ceremony; beneath top hats, black cloches and wideawakes were suits of grey flannel, blazers and plus-fours. All were garnished in crepe streamers on which hung rhubarb, beer and wine bottles, remains of the 'wake'. At the station the funereal party moved along the platform hilariously singing a dirge and the 'corpse' was installed in a third-class compartment where gifts of fruit and rhubarb were handed solemnly in. 30 05 26

1930 09 26

The Master of Clare College told librarians that a wealthy member of the college had made a benefaction on condition that his bones were preserved above ground. His body was put in a cupboard above the Hall. But undergraduates came to know of this and took away various bones as mementoes. The college replaced them with other bones so that skeleton remained more or less complete. But on Christmas Eve the ghost of the benefactor visits various undergraduate rooms gathering in his scatter parts. 30 09 26f

1931 04 03

A fire was discovered in a gable of The Grove, Fordham; the damage was not great. The brigade cannot discover any cause of the outbreak. It is a part of old Cambridge folk lore that a fire always follows if a hare runs down the main street of a village. The week before a hare did run down the street at Fordham. It was perused by Mr Richard Nicholls, a septuagenarian, and was killed in a shed within three yards of the place where this fire broke out. 31 04 03m

1931 04 17

Facts about folk lore – interesting article – 31 04 17e

1931 05 29

Mr Harry Semark, of Willingham still constructs the old-fashioned straw hives which are universally condemned by modern beekeepers and now seldom seen even in the 'backward' villages. Yet he exports them to America and the remote Antipodes. In a recent book there is a photograph of a lorry stacked sky-high with Willingham skeps. It is a coiled straw basket, woven by hand with strips of osier. The basket can be moulded to any shape, straw in his hands is like clay to the potter 31 05 29g

1931 06 12

A Cambridge motor firm – W.E. Harding of Seven Sisters garage, Newmarket Road – has been barred from trading with undergraduates by the Vice Chancellor. Under university rules tradesmen must notify tutors by the end of term of any debt exceeding £5 incurred by an undergraduate. But Mr Harding had not been told this. Only two other such notices have appeared within living memory. Now any student having any dealings with the firm may be suspended or rusticated. 31 06 12b

1931 07 17

After a lapse of 35 years an old custom was revived at Burwell. The University holds the position of Lay Rector of the parish and the Vice-Chancellor used to visit the church annually. This year he was attended by the Esquire Bedells, and the Marshall with their silver maces. On arrival at church he put on his scarlet cope of office before following the choir into the chancel. After the service they took lunch at the vicarage. 31 07 17h

1931 10 02

It is easier to kill a man than to kill a custom so every year on Sept 25th the Mayor, Town Clerk, Bailiffs and Town Crier form a solemn procession which proceeds to Stourbridge Common to open the Fair. But this year not even schoolchildren were there to greet them and a News reporter was the sole representative of the public until a solitary figure strolled up. There were no roundabouts, swings or stalls, not even the traction engine that last year was the final relic of a dying fair, puffed and snorted in welcome. 31 10 02d

1932 01 01

The custom of dancing out the Old Year grows apace, most of the Cambridge dance halls had special celebrations and crowds flocked to all of them. Then in the early hours the streets were thronged with men and women, old and young alike, who gaily wandered home, having little time for thought of Income Tax or other worries. 32 01 01a

1932 03 24

Cambridgeshire folk used to bake a large cake on Good Friday and, when dry, grate it into powder. This, mixed with water, was considered a panacea for many ills, especially diarrhoea. A popular Easter Sunday dish was known as 'herb' or 'season pudding, a kind of batter with onions, sage, thyme etc. Stool ball, a forerunner of cricket, commenced its season at Easter and games were played on village greens for prizes of candy cakes, a confection composed of eggs, sugar, flour, cream, spinach leaves and butter. 32 03 24 & a

1932 05 21

What would papers do without Cambridge undergraduates' pranks? During a hard frost years ago some 150 callow youths had a 'curling' bonspiel on the pond at Emmanuel College. Each had a china bowl in lieu of the orthodox curling stone – and each bowl contained a lighted candle. Overnight a thaw set in and visitors watched gardeners salvaging the 'curling stones' from the bottom of the pond. Shortly afterwards undergraduates took a donkey dressed in cap and gown into dinner in hall. Most of the aged dons mistook him for one of themselves! But in those days no newspaper commented. 32 05 21a

1932 05 21

The inner history of the King's College roof-climbing escapade has been revealed. The hazardous feat was carried out by two parties of undergraduates, including several well known athletes, who are members of a secret organisation composed of skilled mountain climbers. They used the lightning conductor which has been loosened by previous generations of climbers. It is the climax of a series of climbs during the past few months; now they proposed to publish detailed accounts of their exploits 32 05 21

1932 05 24

Night-climbers Kings chapel & Eton – 32 05 24

1932 06 01

The 'Brighter Roofs for Colleges' movement is growing. Overnight at Ridley Hall two cords were stretched from one of the college towers. On them pyjamas, pyjamas and still more pyjamas were floating in the wind. Large ones, small ones, brightly-coloured and silk examples were proudly swaying in the breeze and in the middle was suspended a parson's hat. After they had been lowered to the ground their various owners joined in a frantic scramble for their particular pairs which had been removed from their rooms. 32 06 01a

1932 06 02

King's nightclimbing – brolly removed – 32 06 02

1932 06 06

Nightclimbing craze spreads to Emmanuel – 32 06 06d

1932 08 26

Sir – recently at the Dorothy Café I sat at the table with an elderly farmer and the conversation drifted to the difficulty of obtaining reliable farm labour. Then he sang me a song of goodwill, grit and endeavour. It starts 'Now if you will listen a moment or two, I'll sing you a bit of a rhyme, I'll tell you what I think a man must do, To make the best use of his time.' Is it an old Cambridgeshire folk song? – J.T. Lambeth 32 08 26d

1932 11 30

Please make what use of this you may. Kindly remember where it came from – www.mikepetty.org.uk

Miser's ghost seen Magdalene St 30.11.1932

1932 12 20

An old Cambridgeshire custom on New Year's Eve was for a farm girl to approach a pig and slap it sharply with her hand. If the animal uttered a squeal, she would be married within the year; but if it took no heed of the blow she would continue a spinster. Another custom was to stick tiffs of grass on the horns of a cow. If it tossed them off their lover would remain true, if they remained firm on the horns, the sweetheart was false. 32 12 30e & f

1932 12 30

Christmas customs and beliefs – 32 12 23a New year superstitions – 32 12 30e & f

1933 01 25

East Anglian folk lore society – 33 01 25a

1933 05 02

The large room of the Central Girls' School was charmingly decorated with garlands of cowslips when abdicating May Queen, Lorna James, delightfully dressed in a daffodil frock, crowned her successor, Miss Rita Baynes. Dressed like a rose in a pink gown with a train of petals she approached the throne through a triumphal arch of greenery and received the homage of her subjects who each brought a bunch of flowers. 33 05 02

1933 05 13

The Eastern Counties Folklore Society held its first meeting at the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Dr Haddon explained its object was to collect and record folk customs, rites and beliefs. One charm he mentioned had been discovered at Babraham: a stone which was put into the manger to cure a horse of night sweats – supposed to be caused by the animal being ridden by a witch. 33 05 13

1933 06 06

The Whit Monday horse and pony parade was revived on Midsummer Common. The beasts had been brushed until their silky coats gleamed in the sunshine and their carts and vans 'groomed' for the occasion. Even a coal cart becomes a thing of beauty when it is resplendent in a new coat of brightly-coloured paint matched only by gaily-coloured ribbons. Many of the spectators came in horse-drawn carriages and even the police were mounted. But the Mayor arrived in a car 33 06 06a & b

1933 06 07

The Backs near King's bridge were crowded with punts when the Cambridge University Madrigal Society performed the annual rite of singing on the river. As the sun went down and the moon rose from behind the Gibbs' Building, the cawing of the rooks and the noises of the town ceased, and over the water came the sounds of a Brahms' motet. An aeroplane buzzed like an angry wasp across the sky but failed to break the spell of magical voices which softly floated in the air. 33 06 07

1933 06 13

The roof-climber who 'pinched' the two weathervanes off the Squire Law Library building seems to have had an attack of conscience, for the missing cock and fish were replaced last night. But they also left tasteful decorations and souvenirs in the shape of two sherry bottles at each end of an arch high over the entrance to the Geological Museum. They are said to be full and so act as 'bait' to other scalers of walls and roofs. 33 06 13

1933 06 13

Over 1,300 dancers disported themselves at the First and Third Trinity Boat Club's ball. As usual there were large crowds of spectators lining all the entrances and not a few on the river but great precautions had been taken to avoid gate crashing with two lots of 'sentries'. Inside the place was aglow with thousands of coloured lights while the dance tent itself, with its famous parquet floor, was

electrically lit. From a dais in the centre the Embassy band played a sweet programme of dance music until the early hours of the morning. 33 06 13b

1934

Morris Men instituted [Misc.2.5]

1934 02 26

Jesus College boat crew celebrated their Lents victory with a bonfire on the grass in front of the college and flames forty feet high dried the pavement in Victoria Avenue. An old boat helped to keep the fire going and when the supply of fuel ran short branches from trees were used. Police kept a wary eye on hoardings which might have been looked upon as sources but no raids were made. 250 paper glasses were provided to hold the beer but some preferred it straight from the bottle 34 02 26

1934 05 02

May Day queen – 34 05 02

1935 01 23

Witch's hand sold – cures diseases – 35 01 23f

1935 02 25

Cambridge met Oxford in the spirit of peace, not of semi-lethal combat. The ceremony took place near the pump on the green at Sherington, Buckinghamshire, exactly half-way between the two universities. Two morning-coated representatives vied in the vehemence of their protestations of fraternal feeling and in the sartorial elegance of their attire. Then to the whirr of newsreel cameras they buried a hatchet beneath the pump. Afterwards a village worthy who had forgotten his tie, collar, shaving water and washing water in the excitement of the morning, came up to the immaculately attired Master of Ceremonies, thanking him putting Sherington on the map. 35 02 25a & b

1935 06 11

Catherine Parsons said people believed that midnight was the hour when ghosts would be seen. No one would pass the Roman road crossing to Streetley End for fear of being pelted with large things like apple dumplings. But Horseheath ghosts were quite harmless and included a poor girl whose coming was heralded by a sound like buzzing bees, three headless women dressed in black who wandered in from Camps and a headless man with a red handkerchief around his neck. The finest spectacle was a coffin borne up Limbery's Hill followed by a long procession of mourners. 35 06 11 & a

1936 02 24

Burning the boat at Jesus College following success at Lent Race – photo – 36 02 24

1936 03 04

Sultan of Zanzibar hoax – photo – at reported death Horace Cole - 36 03 04

1936 03 14

Undergraduates last night hazardously climbed to the roof of Emmanuel College North Court and decorated six chimneys with chamber pots. They were removed by Mr S. Burgess of Messrs Prime's the builders who is often called in to remove various objects placed in inaccessible positions by exuberant undergraduates. "Some of them can run up brick walls", he said: one took off his shoes and went down a wall by means of his feet and hands alone to remove a gown that had been placed in a particularly difficult spot. 36 03 14

1936 04 06

Old Cambridgeshire Easter customs - 36 04 06

1936 04 11

For those on enjoyment bent Cambridge offered plenty of attractions on Good Friday. That 'hardy annual', skipping on Parker's Piece, showed no sign of waning in popularity; a large-sized crowd gathered to watch and take part. Various stall-holders seized the opportunity to set up their portable businesses beside the Piece. The streets wore their usual holiday deserted look, but neither that nor the temperatures deterred the cycling ice-cream salesmen. The Town football match drew some 5,000 spectators while the brass band concert in the Guildhall was a popular affair and the cinemas were open in the afternoon and evening. 36 04 11a – photos 36 04 11

1936 04 27

Some members of King's College went mountaineering last night. A Union Jack and the Abyssinian emblem were fixed to the pinnacles at the east end of the chapel with a large banner slung between them bearing the words 'Save Ethiopia'. The flags were still flying during the morning but the banner was blown down by the wind. A man who was astir early claimed to have seen four undergraduates climbing up at four o'clock. Unfortunately he was unable to see what means of assistance they were using in their climb, otherwise one of Cambridge's age-old mysteries would have been solved 36 04 27c

1937 03 27

Why does skipping always take place on Parker's Piece, Cambridge on Good Friday and Easter Monday? An old man of 83 remembers skipping there as a boy of five or six and his father apparently did so before him. It seems that Good Friday used to be the publican's 'day out' and they used to repair to the Piece for a game of bat and trap, while their youngsters amused themselves with a skipping rope. We don't hear much about Bat and Trap nowadays but the skipping goes on as of yore. – 37 03 27

1937 05 03

Labour Party's May Day demonstration on Parker's Piece, 500 marches – 37 05 03a & b

1937 12 24

Fellowship House toy distribution, which has taken place about Christmas-time for the last five years, came to an end after a very strenuous week. Altogether nearly 1,300 bags were distributed to the children of all unemployment men whose addresses were obtained from the Employment Exchange. Each bag contained an old toy, a new toy, a book, orange and bag of sweets and were delivered by private cars. Then as a 'Grand Finale' some 1,400 children were given a free film entertainment at the Victoria Cinema. 37 12 24

1937 12 28

Christmas festivities at Cambridge, Ross Street Children's Home, Home of Mercy – 37 12 28 Mill Road Infirmary, Harvey Goodwin Home, Mill Road Sanatorium, Church Army Home, Union Lane Institution 37 12 28a

1938 12 10

Spiritualist meeting – 38 12 10d, e

1938 12 13

Testing a medium's power – letter – 38 12 13

1938 12 22

It was a custom in Cambridgeshire for labourers to drag a Yule log into the manor to the accompaniment of singing and to place with the new log a charred piece of the log of the previous year to ensure prosperity to the household. There is also a belief that if a piece of the burnt Yule log is kept in the cellar throughout the year it will preserve the house from fire. Boughs of mistletoe hung outside a door to ward off evil. Cottages burn light in window to guide baby Jesus to the dwelling and disk of milk and 'creed' wheat, sweetened with honey or sugar, sometimes laced with run, was served to all comers. Carol singers with the old violin, concertina or double-bass, farmer throws feather into

air to forecast growing conditions, Christmas day dinner, University scholars erected Prince of Misrule, Mumming plays - Stuart-Baker 38 12 22c (see Memories 30 December 2013)

1939 03 23

Army take part in Good Friday skipping on Parker's Piece – 40 03 23

1939 04 08

Good Friday skipping photo – 39 04 08

1939 05 08

Colne May Day festivities – detailed report – 14 05 08j

1939 06 30

In former times it was the custom in the Fens, and in most agricultural districts, to have organised or traditional bonfires in the fields in the evening before Midsummer Day (St. John the Baptist's Day), also upon St. Peter's Day, which is June 29. Why the two bonfire nights are so close together cannot be explained but such fires were believed to exercise a quickening and fertilising effect on animals, crops and even mankind 39 06 30 CIPof

1939 12 27

War could not 'black-out' the Christmas Eve Festival of nine lessons and carols at King's. From the crowded chapel the message of peace and goodwill travelled by wireless across Europe to France, Italy and Switzerland. The candles flickered even after black-out for a test showed no dangerous amount of light could be seen from outside. But there were dark, blank spaces among the rich glory of the stained windows which told of the removal of some of the glass for safety's sake. 39 12 27a

1939 12 29

Christmas, 1939, has meant more solemn thoughts than usual for many. In countless homes, the traditional joy and gaiety has been tempered by absence of one or more members of the family. And yet, in spite of gaps at the dinner table, and because the advice to carry on as usual is so obviously sound, there has been little outward change in the character of the Christmas festival. In Cambridge, as elsewhere, people remembered their absent ones, but through the inspiring co-operation of the radio, were able to satisfy themselves that the men in the Services were not forgotten. At home, it was the usual day of gifts—the children's day—and for many the delight lay in entertaining little evacuees whose parents were unable to do the job themselves. The change in the times was reflected, perhaps, in the opening of some cinemas on Christmas day, but found themselves comparatively few patrons; it was still a home festival for most. The Town club had their usual football fixture in the morning, but this had to be scratched. On Boxing Day their fixture with Rushden resulted in a decisive win for Cambridge. Another regular feature was the appearance of the Christmas Day bathers, who found not thick ice, but a deep fog to greet them. 39 12 29 CIPof

1940

1940 02 23

"May-Ladying". A Histon school log book records: "1871, May 1st—It is the custom for the girls to go May-ladying - go to the principal houses carrying dolls and begging 'Please to 'stow a ha'penny on the poor old Maylady'. Hildersham was the headquarters of the movement. The girls, encouraged and helped by the aristocracy in the village, produced one of the finest Mayladies to be seen in the county, parading with it through their own and neighbouring villages. The parade was at its best in early Victorian days, but began to fade out about 70 years ago. Many old inhabitants can recall the dolls dressed and paraded by the Hildersham girls. The annual Cambridgeshire event became notable, and may be found briefly described in Brand's "Popular Antiquities", published in 1911 40 02 23 CIPof

1940 03 08

Please make what use of this you may. Kindly remember where it came from – www.mikepetty.org.uk

Romance Began at Séance.—Mr. C. S. Collen-Smith, of Cambridge, is to be married to Mrs. Betty Walker, of County Mayo., Ireland. They first met at a séance in Knightsbridge. Mr. Collen-Smith is founder of the World Service Group and of the Healers' Association and is Editor of "World Service and Psychic Review." 40 03 08 CIPof

1940 03 30

Edwin Turner Cottingham, the well-known maker of scientific time recorders, renovated the clock at Trinity College. This had a curious effect on the popular pastime of the undergraduates, who used to run round the quadrangle while the clock was striking twelve. In cleaning the clock he speeded up the striking and it was not until Lord Burghley, the champion hurdler, was up at University that the feat could be accomplished in the time. He also accompanied Prof A.S. Eddington on the British Eclipse Expedition of 1919. 40 03 30a t [1.9]

1940 05 02

St John's choirboys ascend chapel for Ascension Day service while airmen wearing gas masks marched below – 40 05 02a

1940 05 03

The ancient ceremony of "walking the causey" at Barrington s closely allied to that known as "Beating the bounds." The Barrington beater, however, operates only upon the village green. Barrington's official "walker" is now Mr. Fred Patman, and appeared clad in a frock coat, gorgeous waistcoat and a silk "topper," carrying a sword, said to be Roman, and a monster bell, gagged this year because of wartime conditions about bell-ringing. Starting from the south-western end of the green, he walked with stately stride along the old cobbled pathway across the green to the church, making "official" proclamations en route, and knocking at the door of an old thatched house, once the town hall, but now a private residence, his progress towards the church being witnessed by many villagers. 40 05 03 CIPof

1940 11 15

An octogenarian farm worker in a South Cambs village lamented the loss of his "muckinger" in the fields and he hoped any one finding it would return it to him, as it was a present from his daughter in London. A "muckinger" is an old colloquial name for the large red cotton pocket handkerchief in common use by farm workers. The name is heard more often in Essex than Cambridgeshire and it is interesting to note that the word heard last week was voiced by an old inhabitant of Heydon 40 11 15 CIPof

1941 02 21

Last local wearer. Some time ago a few interested Cambridgeshire antiquaries tried to discover who was the last farm hand in the country to wear the smock front seriously. He says "seriously" because one often sees it worn nowadays in fancy dress parades. The investigators came to the conclusion that the smock was last worn by an old shepherd at Little Abington, near Linton, somewhere about the year 1892. My correspondent goes on to say the smocks were worn on Sundays as a sort of best dress, long after it was customary to wear them as a working dress, and that a clean smock, corded breeches, worsted stockings, a beaver or other make of top hat and greased lace-up boots formed the approved rural costume for Sabbath and holiday wear. A little more than half a century — in some parts of Cambridgeshire a full century — however, has passed since the gaberdine or smock was as honourable & distinction of carters and shepherds as the uniforms of the men in our fighting forces today 41 02 21 CIPof

1941 03 07

Smock Wearing Shepherd, Writing from 57 New Road, Sawston, Mr. Alf A. Hills states: "I was greatly interested in the letters from your readers of "The Passing Hour" last week in regard to the shepherd mentioned there Mr. E. Gilbey, who is living with me, informs me that the name is spelt quite correctly and that his name was William Gooden, an uncle of his wife's, whose maiden name was Jessie Gooden. This old gentleman used to wear his smock on Sunday as well as weekdays, and

as far as Mr, Gilbey remembers, used to visit him at Worsted Lodge (in smock) in 1905 41 03 07
CIPof

1941 08 29

Harvest Horn. Among the "Wanted" advertisements in last week's paper was one asking for "domestic bygoness," and making special mention of old fire hooks, a farm smock, a harvest horn, articles required for the Old English Museum in Shepreth. Smocks and fire hooks are bulky articles not likely to be destroyed, but the harvest horn, a comparatively small instrument, may easily be overlooked, mislaid or cast aside as something of no importance, and perhaps not understood by the average villager today. Years ago in every agricultural village at harvest time, it was customary for a boy to walk slowly through a village, at or shortly before sunrise, and blow a horn as a signal for the labourer to go into the harvest fields. These horns were of simple design and of various sizes, and were sold mainly at Stourbridge Fair. Those in common use in Cambridgeshire were of stout block-tin, 16 inches in length, straight in shape, and tapering from a quarter of an inch (excluding trumpet-like mouthpiece) to an opening of about 2½ inches in diameter. The last of the horn-blowers in South Cambridgeshire was William King, of Melbourn, who died in December, 1935, aged 84 years. When a lad of about seven years of age (say about 1858) he was chosen to perambulate at sunrise and blow the horn, a harvest-time job he did for several years, his horn notes being heard at times both at Shepreth and Meldreth.

1942 06 04

Madrigals on river, one of few surviving May Week events – 42 06 04a

1943 11 01

Cambridge Corn Exchange venue for Barn Dance staged by American Red Cross for US forces' celebration of traditional American custom of Hallowe'en ... at one end a Guy Fawkes surrounded by straw ... dances consisted slow foxtrots and quicksteps to the famous American Flying Eagles band. Were crates of apples and pears from which the many dancers, numbering about 1,800 were at liberty to help themselves. Refreshments served free of charge by an American clubmobile – a canteen on wheelers – about 3,000 American doughnuts, 25 gallons of coffee and 30 gallons of cider, beside orange and lemonade. Pumpkins cut into faces grotesquely illuminated by candles ... 43 11 01

1944

Montgomery claims his father leaped up steps at Trinity College in one bound [1.10]

1944 04 08

Good Friday skipping survives, though not to same extent as pre-war; a small van arrived with some gaily-coloured windmills, paper hats and balls – 44 04 08

1944 04 28

A Medicine Woman's Garden. A correspondent sends me the following note, written by an old lady now over 80 years of age. "I have read about 'medicine' or 'wise women' in villages. When a little girl I lived in a Cambridgeshire village and next door to an old woman said to be a witch and a fortune teller, also a maker of ointment and pills. She was very ugly and much wrinkled, but I will not name her or the village, because some of her family are still living. I used to run errands for her, and go with her for walks, as she was very old. She had a garden full of wild flowers, most of which she is said to have used in her ointments, etc. Some of the things she had, if I remember rightly were foxgloves, fennel, featherfew, coltsfoot, dandelion, sowthistle, periwinkle, woodsage, rosemary, mouse-ear, marigolds, and, of course, rhubarb and common nettles. In our walks in the fields she would take a bag and collect, when in season, cowslips, male fern, red clover, bark from oak and alder trees, also the leaves of the white violet and horse chestnut. A doctor came in a gig only when sent for and when children had a rash, pimples, bumps and minor aches and pains, they were taken to the old medicine woman for treatment and parents appeared to be perfectly satisfied. 44 04 28 CIPof

1946 10 09

Gt St Mary's curfew bell to be rung again for first time since war; will sound at 9m followed by number of strokes indicating date of month; until 1929 a bell was rung at 5am, this 'The Apprentice's Bell', later 'The Bedmakers' Bell'; was discontinued as not needed now there were alarm clocks – 46 10 09

1948 11 08

Cambridge has lost a well-known townsman by the death of Mr Arthur Deck, one of the founders of the Cambridge Pharmaceutical Association. He will be remembered for continuing the custom started by his grandfather, Isaiah Deck, in 1815, the year of Waterloo. He used to send up one rocket to mark the passing of the old year and another to herald the arrival of the New Year. This custom ceased with the coming of the First World War, but for many years Mr Deck was responsible for letting off the maroons to mark the beginning and the end of the two minutes silence on Armistice Day 48 11 08

1949 01 15

The college of Corpus Christi will be the scene of an unusually interesting dinner – the Queenborough Feast. It will be the first of its kind and will link university and town in a very happy way. When in 1948 Lord Queenborough gave to the college an endowment for a feast he expressed the hope that representatives of the corporation and of the citizens of Cambridge would be the principal guests in order that the ties between borough and college might thereby be recognised and strengthened, The college owes its origin to two Cambridge guilds which consisted very largely of citizens of Cambridge c49 01 15 [1.16]

1949 04

Only one stall on Parkers Piece but no skipping, in 1948 only three groups of people who continued it & that year stalls dwindled to one which set up at junction of East Road & Gonville Place & sold tinsel-covered balls on elastic [4.2,1.23]

1950

1951

The annual ceremony on top of Cambridge castle mound at 7.30 am on Eastern Sunday morning is becoming traditional. The company sings 'Christ the Lord is Risen Today' and then asks for God's blessing on Cambridge and its people. The event originated with Victoria Road Congregational Church and was intended to be a simple act of cheerful witness to the Easter message. Now it is attended by people from many churches. It has been held annually for the past five years and attracts around 50 people. It is strangely impressive to look over the quiet town in the light of early morning and to hear the words of Christian faith lifting from the hilltop to be carried far and wide c51 03 23

1951

Over a hundred people assembled at Myers Memorial Hall, Cambridge to hear Mr Ernest Thompson lecture on "Electronic Communication with the Spirit World" and to witness a demonstration of the new super-ray apparatus which produced some astonishing results. Four people were seated round a suspended tube which was connected to the apparatus. Three of them definitely went into a state of trance. Mr Thompson altered the action of the rays by pressing some levers with the result that those in the trance state showed remarkable changes in their behaviour c51 11 09

1956 08 23

Histon 'ghost' story – 56 08 23a, 56 08 28 56 08 31b

1956 09 05

Histon ghost stories – letters – 56 09 05a & b

1956 09 26

The annual Hawkey supper organised by Trumpington Young Farmers' Club was a real harvest supper in the old-fashioned spirit. Mrs V.C. Pemberton described how 70 years ago when hired

themselves to farmers who took them on for a year, paying wages at the end of the engagement. In 1922 shepherds wore a piece of wool in their buttonhole, horsekeepers a piece of whipcord and men who were not much good for anything a piece of cow's tail. The bargain was sealed by both parties shaking hands on the 'luck penny' which was as good as an oath. 56 09 26 & a

1957 01 10

The Oyster House in Garlic Row was named after hundreds of oyster shells found in the garden. It dates from 1707 and was originally known as the Tiled Booth in which the Mayor and Vice Chancellor would feast at the traditional opening of Stourbridge Fair. The house was bought for a small amount by John Lee, a coprolite digger, whose initials can be seen on a plaque on the building. Now it is scheduled for demolition. 57 01 10

1957 03 06

A hundred undergraduates who gathered on Magdalene Bridge to see the inaugural Shrove Tuesday Pancake Race run between the porters and bulldogs of three colleges were the victims of a joke. But not entirely. Diminutive, cheerful Horace Reed, who is 56 and works in Magdalene kitchens, appeared alone, aproned and carrying a frying pan. He ran the course, tossing a pancake from time to time. The event was arranged by the Pitt Club, who have inaugurated several successful hoaxes recently. 57 03 06

1957 05 24

The Night Climbers of Cambridge are at it again. At daybreak two objects had been placed on the spires of King's college chapel. One is the globe of a Belisha beacon, the other a nylon stocking. There was a turret-climbing episode in May 1932 on the eve of Empire Day when a Union Jack was flying from the north-east turret. Two nights previously the pinnacles were decorated with open umbrellas 57 05 24

1957 06 15

Cambridge Night Climbers spend the small hours of the night among the college piers and pinnacles. They work in groups of two or three and their equipment is a pair of soft shoes and gloves with sometimes a punt cushion for crossing the spikes and broken glass set in concrete. They climb for the love of climbing and regard the leaving of flags or underclothes as an error of taste bordering on exhibitionism. 57 06 15c

1957 11 29

The Mayor of Cambridge reminded two councillors that it had been the custom for 400 years that councillors should wear black gowns. He asked them to conform. But Coun Edwards said he was allergic to wearing a uniform of any kind and could do the job as well without a robe. The Mayor told him it was not optional and no one had refused in the past 57 11 29

1958 06 05

Christ's College's Milton Society processed at a suitably dignified pace to the west door of Great St Mary's where the President, holding a bust of John Milton, denounced 'the dangerous and damnable works' of T.S. Elliot. He placed a selection of Elliot's books on the pavement and, after a libation of petrol had been poured on to them, applied a match. The Secretary read aloud some passages from the work of John Milton and with a cry of 'Paradise Regained' the procession returned to Christ's 58 06 05

1958 12 30

The annual Grantchester Boxing Day barrel rolling contest was inaugurated three years ago by Mr R. Healey, landlord of the Rose and Crown public house. It is becoming increasingly popular and attracts people from the surrounding district. It consists of three races. The men's was won by Mr Maurice, the women's by Miss Barbara Peters and the children's by Miss Patricia Rose with Miss Sharyn Griggs second. The youngest competitor was five-year-old Helen Tanner 59 12 30

1959 06 10

The banks of the Cam were lined when the Cambridge University Madrigal Society gave its annual concert on the Backs. It was a very English scene: crowds of impassive spectators defied the fickle weather and a forest of coloured umbrellas rose from the punts on the river. Even the roar of a passing aeroplane and the threat of rain never put the singers off their stride. As the strains of the last madrigal – ‘Draw on Sweet Night’- wafted slowly across the river, lanterns were lit and the punts carrying the singers began to move slowly downstream 59 06 10c & d

1959 11 26

Many shops in the city sell ‘Cambridge Cheese’. This is a soft white cheese, delicious and wholesome. But when analysed some examples were found to be deficient in fat, based on a Ministry recipe that ‘so many pints of full-cream milk produce so much cheese’. However expert housewives say that Cambridge Cheese could be made with skimmed milk and as the labelling did not say ‘cream cheese’ no action would be taken. 59 11 26d

1960s The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960 06 08

Students lounged on the river banks using their gowns as table cloths for alfresco meals and thousands of people crowded the Backs for the University Madrigal Society’s punt-borne concert. Madrigals for five voices did not carry far against the chilly breeze and aeroplanes (‘most tiresome’ said the conductor, Raymond Leppard) and ducks competed for attention. But the audience listened in rapt silence until the singers’ raft moved slowly away to the strains of ‘Draw on, Sweet Night’. 60 06 08b

1960 10 18

The Vice Chancellor has banned all undergraduates from taking part in Guy Fawkes Night celebrations in the city centre. In recent years November 5th had been marked by particularly destructive and violent acts, including the use of home-made fireworks, which have caused painful injuries to innocent bystanders. Although students have played only a minor part at the occasions the University are under an obligation to help the city authorities check such disorderly conduct. Now Market Hill and the surrounding area will be out of bounds to members of the University ‘in statu pupillari’ between 7 pm and midnight 60 10 18

1961 04 14

Ghost hunters will investigate a small house in Staffordshire Gardens although the building is not haunted and is scheduled to be demolished. Tony Cornell of Girton, who travels all over the country investigating haunted houses, believes it is not spirits who throw things or cause the mysterious knockings which have driven people from their homes in fright. The effects may be caused by vibrations coming through the floor and up the walls. He will attach a ‘vibration machine’ to the wall and place ornaments on the floor and mantelpieces then conduct a scientific experiment to simulate the erratic wanderings of a poltergeist. 61 04 14a

1961 06 02

Wooden spoon recalled – 61 06 02a

1961 06 08

Thirteen members of the Christ’s College Milton Society took part in the traditional annual ‘pilgrimage’ to the main door of Great St Mary’s Church to burn the works of T.S. Eliot. With caps and gowns, and carrying a bust of the poet Milton, the undergraduates walked in procession through the crowded Market Square. Then in front of the church the ‘damnable and dangerous works’ of T.S. Eliot (Penguin edition) were set in flames on the paving stones. Crowds appeared from nowhere, cameras were clicked, and passages of Milton read before the procession returned towards Christ’s and noggins of nut brown ale 61 06 08a

1962 06 13

Dr Frank Leavis of Downing College, was spared seeing his books burnt on the steps of Great St Mary's Church. The Milton Society annually burns the poems of T.S. Eliot who has attacked Milton the poet in a tradition that dates back to 'the mists of time'. But newspapers had suggested they'd be attacking Dr Leavis personally which was not a proper thing to do as he'd just retired. 62 06 13

1962 10 16

A 'mock funeral' was held for two undergraduates, Philip Gurden of Magdalene and Simon Keswick of Trinity, who were sent down for failing their exams. Their 'coffin' was carried on a sports car while in the 'cortege' at the rear was Prince William of Gloucester who is at Magdalene College 62 10 16

1962 12 08

Collections at the Round Table's Christmas tree in St Andrew the Great churchyard began in 1953. Last year they raised money to provide 415 parcels for old people, each containing £1-worth of Christmas cheer. The names of old people who benefit from this magnificent effort are revised each year and every person is visited before Christmas. One year a 30-foot high tree was delivered and putting it up meant dislocating the traffic outside Christ's College for some time. 62 12 08

1963 01 26

Plough Monday memories from Pampisford 1887, Swaffham, Cambridge - 63 01 26b

1963 06 19

The ancient tradition of making corn dollies has been saved from extinction by a book written by Mrs Minnie Lambeth, the wife of the rural industries organiser. She is an expert, continually plaiting and producing them for people all over the world. The Cambridgeshire dolly is either a bell or umbrella. Only a handful of people are making straw dollies in the corn growing area of the country and are facing difficulties in getting hollow straw as combine harvesters work better with the short, solid-stemmed straw. 63 06 19

1963 12 10

A.D. Cornell, an expert on extra-sensory perception, has spent 15 years seeking ghosts but has never actually seen one, though he has heard and felt them. He described many different local hauntings. Phantoms at first seemed so solid and real that you do not realise it is a ghost until the apparition gradually faded away. In the Victorian era with flickering candlelight and gas lamps people were more in tune with the unseen. But modern conditions with brilliant electric lights were not suitable for ghosts, he says 63 12 10a

1964 08 04

The annual Caucus Race at Trinity College saw undergraduates in gowns set off on a mad career around the Great Court. Each man must run round every rectangle in the pattern formed by the grass. Some crafty students carried mathematically-calculated routes and beneath their gowns wore running shorts and plimsolls. After the race many competitors cooled off with a face-splash from the fountain in the middle of the court and enjoyed a firkin of college ale. The idea of the race began a few years ago on the inspiration of a passage in 'Alice in Wonderland' 64 08 04

1964 08 11

Charlie is tall with bushy sideboards, a stovepipe hat and a face resembling Abraham Lincoln. It is thought he was a schoolmaster at Paxton Hall who died many years ago. But it has become increasingly apparent that his ghost still haunts the old gate house. There is one bedroom which smells of stale cigars and no matter how hard the door is closed, it always opens again. The pet cat, on reaching the room, scampers down the stairs as fast as possible. Another cat jumps on the bed, purring loudly. But there is nothing there. 64 08 11

1966 04 28

University ban King Street run; started 40 years ago – 66 04 11a; does not take place 66 04 21c; takes place in authorities defiance of proctors – 66 04 28c

1966 09 06

Harry Day played penny whistle; at Stourbridge Fair joined 'Herb' Reynolds and Charlie Hunter with their concertinas and harp on the upper floor of the Oyster House playing reels, waltzes etc – 66 09 06

1967 04 27

National Folk Week, Morris Men & Russell Wortley, customs recalled – 67 04 27a

1967 08 07

Trinity College annual Caucus run around Gt Court – 67 08 07a

1967 08 31

Trumpington church Black Magic celebration & desecration – 67 08 31 & a

1968 08 26

Enid Porter, Folk Museum – profile – 68 08 26

1969 03 19

Enid Porter 'Cambridgeshire customs and folklore' book published; review – 69 03 19b

1971

Morris Men - 300 converge for 150th meeting Morris Ring [Misc.2.5]

1971 11 23

Cambridge Assize closure ends 710-year tradition of judge's stay at Trinity college – 71 11 23a

1977 10 18

Undergraduates at Jesus College, Cambridge, are to keep watch in an ancient room for ghostly happenings on the night of All Souls. They will be on the look-out for the seven members of the college's reputed Everlasting Club, formed in 1738 which conferred eternal membership. Once a year the members promised to return to their original meeting room. But one by one they died. In 1766 the last surviving member sat down for annual celebration with six empty chairs for his deceased colleagues. From 10 until midnight there was a 'hideous uproar' in the room after which he was found dead. 77 10 18

1977 11 03

Ghostly members of the 300-year-old Cambridge Everlasting Club failed to make their appearance at midnight despite a vigil by Jesus College students. More than a dozen undergraduates gathered in a room at the top of an ancient staircase to wait for the annual reunion of the club which claimed to confer eternal membership on those invited to join it. All members of the club are reputed to have met grisly deaths and the room was sealed for many years as a result. Last night the student occupant invited fellow members of the Jesus Old Contemptibles dining club to join him for drinks but nothing happened despite the consumption of bottles of port. 77 11 03

1980

1980 01 12

Dr Russell Wortley, one of the country's best-known folklorists, has died. He was out with the Cambridge Morris Men for their Plough Monday celebrations when he collapsed. He was behind the revival of the custom of Molly dancing on Plough Monday; it had disappeared long ago but he revived it in its Jubilee year. On the national scene he was bagman (secretary) of the Morris Ring for many years in the 1950s. A former editor of the English Folk Song and Dance Society Journal he was

an expert on folk music, seeking out and recording many local songs and dances. He also played a variety of old instruments. 80 01 12

1980 11 07

Cambridge's muffin man a man of many parts – 80 11 07b

1980 12 24

Weird ghosts of Madingley Hall – 80 12 24 & a &c

1981 01 09

There is a tinge of sadness about the Plough Monday celebrations this year. Russell Wortley, who did so much to restore the custom and was instrumental in bringing back the Molly Dancers, died last January while Molly Dancing at Comberton. But he left a permanent record in notes and articles which have now been published by the Cambridge Morris Men. 81 01 09b

1981 09 18

Poltergeist manifestations, Arbury – Tony Cornell interviewed – 81 09 18c

1982 07 16

An Aladdin's cave of curious dusty lots comes under the hammer as former stage props are auctioned off at the old Festival Theatre in Newmarket Road, Cambridge. There's a glorious throne, the prow of a sailing ship and a pair of giant Corinthian columns, most of which have appeared at the Arts Theatre, which owns the building. It is said the Festival has a ghost – an old woman who was brought in to die after being run down by a horse and cart which bolted when delivering scenery. Dame Flora Robson wrote of meeting her. 82 07 16

1987 04 19

A centuries-old tradition was revived on Good Friday when crowds swarmed to skip on Parker's Piece. Tourists looked on in bewilderment as children, mums, dads and grannies took their turn. Even the Mayor, Coun John Woodhouse, had a go with the skipping rope, although he had not skipped since playground days. His wife revealed that as children they both used skipping ropes to tie up people's doors. The event was arranged by Radio Cambridgeshire with News columnist Christopher South roping in onlookers to have a go. – 87 04 18

1987 09 16

Granta Morris, which meets at St Luke's Barn in French's Road, sprang into life five years ago. The Squire, Leigh Watson who knows 190 dances, calls out instructions as the accordion strikes up tunes such as 'Headington' which is based on bean-setting. Granta perform at fetes, pubs and college May balls. Sometimes they encounter hecklers. Three skinheads started taunting them once so Leigh invited them to have a go. The trio soon admitted Morris deserves respect. But yobs threw stink-bombs under the feet in North Wales - 87 09 16

1987 10 02

There is a distinct shortage of spooky hauntings in Cambridge at the moment and the Cambridge University Society for Psychical Research is keen to carry out detailed experiments into the eerie and unexplained. A few years ago a young girl got lost while out with her parents on the Gogs where archaeologists were excavating Roman artefacts. When found, she told them she had been speaking to a Roman soldier. An expert interviewed her and admitted she gave an exact description of a soldier from those times, yet the girl knew nothing about that period in history. What was the girl seeing and in which language was she communicating? The Society hope the family will contact them 87 10 02a

1988 06 27

Fortune tellers at Midsummer Fair – feature – 88 06 27a

1988 10 29

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Plough Monday celebrations were held at Balsham, Fenstanton and Elsworth where the Cromwell Molly dancers from Great Gransden led a procession of villagers to both pubs, The Poacher and the George and Dragon. They also stopped at a beamed cottage, formerly the Plough pub where, after rolling back the carpet, the dancers sang and jigged to traditional tunes wearing hobnailed boots and decorated clothes. One of the men dressed as a milkmaid – but kept his boots on. At Fenstanton the dancers followed the historical ritual of blacking their faces and donning country costumes before a torch-lit procession from the church to the Chequers, George Inn and the Tudor Hotel. 88 01 13a 1988 Sebastian Coe made history by smashing Lord Burghley's record for the Great Court Run at Trinity College. He pitted himself against Steve Cram in a 'Chariots of Fire'-style race to dash around the court within the time the 400-year-old clock struck noon. Coe, dressed in the outfit worn by Ben Cross who portrayed runner Harold Abrahams in the film, said he could not hear the chimes for the cheering of the 1,500 spectators. The event was seen by millions of TV views around the world and raised money for Great Ormond Street Hospital 88 10 29

1988 11 25

"Witchcraft and Black Magic rife" £CEN 25.11.88

1989 10 13

As a schoolboy, Cambridge ghost hunter Tony Cornell set out to prove that science could explain ghosts and other psychic phenomena. But over half a century later he has changed into a believer. "I have come across a lot of fraud, and a lot of wishful thinking, but when you strip that away, there is still a hard core of things which cannot be explained", he says. Tony has yet to see a ghost but has experienced other things which would make most people's hair stand on end which he will document in a forthcoming book 89 10 13a

1990 01 09

Plough Monday celebrations, Balsham, Fenstanton & Elsworth – 90 01 09a

Undergraduate Customs

c.36.94: bonfire night

1898 11 07

Saturday was a typical "fifth" in Cambridge. Faithfully following the precedent set in former years a number of Varsity men and townspeople assembled in the market place, which for three hours or so was crowded with excitable and pugilistically-inclined youths, representing Town and gown. The Gown driven from pillar to post by the howling mob, appeared to be greatly terrified, and despite the vigilance of the police, of whom a large number were told off for special duty, the celebration was not entirely free from violence. Neither town nor gown missed many opportunities of displaying their physical prowess and many are the reports circulated as to the results of the pugilistic encounters that ensued 1898 11 07

1899 02 09

The attention of the University Council of Senate has been called to the disorder which attended the bonfire on November 24th, 1898 when the actual destruction of property was considerable. They recommend that members of the University are forbidden to take part in making or lighting of bonfires in public places within the precincts of the university. Members offending will render themselves liable to be punished by suspension, rustication, expulsion or otherwise 1899 02 09

1899 11 07

Almost as soon as it was dark a large number of youths made their way to Cambridge Market Hill which was in a short time alive to the crackling and bangings of the smaller fireworks. The 'Varsity', after hall time, joined the townspeople and from eight to eleven there was a roaring, rushing crowd of

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several hundreds about the hill and neighbouring streets. Certain of the townsmen who had begun the day not to wisely by profusely drinking were responsible for the greater part of the disorder and were seized and marched off by the ever-vigilant gentlemen in blue - 1899 11 07

1900 05 21

Cambridge has celebrated the relief of Mafeking and it has done it right nobly. There was no recurrence of the riotous scene witnessed on the occasion of the relief of Ladysmith, no destruction of property. This was due to one thing, the discretion shown by the powers that be in organising a bonfire on Midsummer Common. People poured in in thousands from the country in anticipation of the festivities and so great was the influx that some streets were rendered well night impassable. Still, the crowds were orderly and the police had no difficulty regulating the traffic 00 05 21

1900 11 06

The 'Fifth' was celebrated on Cambridge in a very orderly fashion. The effigies that once characterised Guy Fawkes Day were conspicuous by their almost entire absence. The best attempt at an effigy was made by three or four men who were rigged out in minstrel fashion and paraded the streets with a vehicle in which were seated representations of Mr Kruger and his wife. This attracted a good deal of attention until the rain came and washed the colour from the faces of the dejected looking figures, and sent the minstrels home 00 11 06

1901 11 06

There is little survival of the old celebrations of "The Fifth" in Cambridge, save one or two groups of youngsters with an eye to stray coppers carried around "guys" which may have been effigies of anything. Builders, having a recollection of losses of material on bonfire nights, had men guarding scaffolding poles, but they were not called upon. The most noticeable thing was the fog – thick, damp and irritating. It was not the kind of weather suitable to a rag or even a bonfire in the back-yard. It was better fun sitting by a snug fireside than standing with cold hands and feet in a choking fog letting off small pyrotechnic fry CDN 1900 11 06

1903 11 06

Time once was when the concentrated animosity between Cambridge Town and Gown found annual outlet on 'The Fifth'. There are many old inhabitants who have seen the traditional riots gradually die down with the building up of mutual ties between University and Town. Athletic Varsitymen and pugilistic townsmen no longer belabour each other; they join issue in attempts at bonfires with police baiting thrown in as a sideline. At Castle End undergraduates managed to secure a shutter with the intention of making it the nucleus of a bonfire; a constable was rolled to the ground, his helmet knocked off and his whistle and truncheon lost before more policemen arrived and three arrests were made – one member of the Varsity, a soldier and a townsman 03 11 06

1904 11 07

The results of the fifth of November 'rag' in Cambridge were more or less serious injuries to two policemen, considerable damage to private property and several police-court summonses. A little boy engaged in firing a squib in the midst of a 'ragging' party proceeding along Jesus Lane was knocked down by a cyclist and rendered insensible. Fortunately he was soon revived by a number of undergraduates who at once attended to him. One man fainted and another was admitted to Hospital suffering from injuries to the head caused by his being knocked down by a cab. 1904 11 07

1905 11 06

It is a recognised custom in Cambridge, which no amount of protest seems able to abolish, to make the celebration of the Fifth the occasion for a rag. This year it fell on a Sunday but this did not deter them and a huge bonfire was started on Midsummer Common. The chief sufferer was G.P. Hawkins whose premises in Parsonage Street was attacked during the Nelson rag and on Saturday another unsuccessful assault was made. But on Sunday several hundred undergraduates returned, smashed the fence and seized egg cases, barrels and a tarpaulin to add to the flames. 05 11 06b [2.16, 1.7]

1905 11 06

The information that a number of Varsity and Town roughs broke into Mr Hawkins' premises on Sunday night and stole and destroyed property to the value of £20 will surprise even Cambridge people. To disturb the peace of a Sabbath by forcibly entering a tradesman's premises and to burn the stolen material in a public place is just as truly a robbery as if the marauders had broken into the Guildhall and taken £20 from the safe. We trust the University authorities will look facts in the face and that such activities will be promptly scotched. 05 11 06a-d

1905 11 10

Rag – great damage to property – 05 11 10 a & b

1905 11 15

Sir – twenty years ago undergraduates at Oxford had two types of 'rag'. On the 5th of November we went out and provoked people who didn't wear caps and gowns to hit us, and we hit them back. Then whenever our college had done something great in sport we burnt up a good deal of the college property in the 'quad' and paid for it in our 'wattels' at the end of term. But when the authorities thought there had been too much friendly hitting they used to 'gate' their colleges en bloc at nine o'clock. Now Cambridge undergraduates have discovered a third sort – plundering, robbing and annoying citizens to get wood for bonfires. This is hooliganism and the Riot Act might not be out of place – V.S.N. 05 11 15

1907 11 09

Few 'Guys' on Nov 5th - mainly a firework festival [2.20]

1907 11 16

Tolerant attitude to Rag but police prevent Market Hill bonfire [2.21]

1908 11 13

Serious gunpowder accident, bonfire night at Quay – 08 11 13

1908 11 13

Bonfire night begging – 08 11 13

1908 05 16

Mayor receives £1 'conscience money' for damage caused 5 Nov 1905 [2.22]

1909 11 12

Bonfire night scenes – CWN 09 11 12

1910 11 11

An undergraduate was fined for assaulting a policeman on Guy Fawkes Night. A considerable amount of damage had been done, hoarding demolished, gas lamps broken, the railway station raided and milk churns overturned. The most serious incident occurred at Jesus Sluice footbridge where a battle royal took place between members of the County Constabulary and a large party of undergraduates and town roughs. They stoned the police, all of whom were hit, and PC Johnson was struck on the forehead by a piece of board and rendered unconscious. Only the arrival of police reinforcements had averted further trouble. 10 11 11 & a

1911 11 10

Serious 'ragging' took place in celebration of the 5th of November. A number of undergraduates carried 'life-preservers' and a violent assault made on the premises of Messrs Rattee and Kett where an employee was seriously injured. A mounted policeman was pulled from his horse and a police sergeant received a nasty cut over his eye. A member of the University was arrested for assault. But beyond the smashing of a number of street lamps little actual damage was done to property 11 11 10a & b

1912 11 08

It was one of the noisiest 'rags' seen for some years, for the introduction of a variety of bomb-firework, which gives a report louder than a rifle shot, more than compensated for the fewer Varsity men than usual. The liveliest scene occurred in King Street where the crowd were attracted by the sight of the hoarding outside the partly-demolished Hobson Street Chapel. Instead they turned their attention array of woodwork in connection with the building of the new Wesleyan Chapel near Christ's Pieces, but this was strongly guarded by police. Another battle broke out in Grange Road where some 400 undergraduates damaged the fence around Mr Ebenezer Smith's garden. 12 11 08a & b

1912 11 08

Histon bonfire night – 12 11 08g

1913 11 07

'Fifth' celebrations, undergraduate rag and its police court sequel. Station Yard scene, mounted police charge, Homerton college attacked 13 11 07 p7 CIP

1919 11 12

"Fifth" fizzles at Cambridge. The stage was set on Wednesday evening for an old-time celebration of the 5th of November. Proctors, "bulldogs," special constables, mounted police, mere "Roberts", undergraduates, townspeople and schoolboys turned out to play their respective roles, but nothing happened. A few fire-works - cannons, crackers etc — were discharged on Market Hill but the proceedings were almost as tame as the original affair arranged by Mr. Guy Fawkes and a few of his fanatical friends 19 11 12 CIPof

1920 11 06

Guy Fawkes rag, no serious damage but several arrests; raid on New Theatre and siege of police station

1922 11 06

A lamp-boy, G.E.R. of Thoday street, Cambridge was summoned for throwing a firework on Senate House-hill on 4th inst. Fined 1s. Ten shillings was the fine imposed upon an undergraduate of Trinity College for a similar offence on Market-hill. Defendant said he did not know they were arresting people for letting fireworks off, or else he would not have been foot enough to do so in front of half the police force. An undergraduate of Corpus Christi who was fined 10s. stated that the came on to the square and saw a lot of police loafing about so he thought he would like to throw some fireworks 22 11 06

1923 11 06

Cambridge would be disappointed indeed if the Fifth of November failed to produce a rag of some sort. Last night's effort was, to say the least of it, feeble and was sustained for the most part by such residents of the town as come out for excitement on such occasions, and a handful of very callow freshmen. Fireworks there were in plenty, but the old spirit was lacking. Had it not been for the mounted police and the proctors, the market square would have been its usual desolate self soon after 9.30 pm. It was noticeable that as soon as the mounted police left the crowd decreased by 50 per cent 23 11 06

1924 11 06

The night of the 5th of November was clear and calm, and there was a bright moon to light the way of revellers – ideal conditions for a "rag". So evidently thought a large crowd of undergraduates and townsmen that gathered on Cambridge Market Hill in hopes. Police stood around in little groups taking a giving chaff good humouredly with the crowd. Squibs and occasional small rockets broke the peace and were heralded by faint cheers and feminine shrieks if they happened to go off in the press.

The first intimation of anything interesting was the sight of a small youth, pale and very troubled looking, marching up St Andrew's street, firmly held by a constabulary hand 24 11 06

1925 11 06

Cambridge usually expects a 'rag' on Guy Fawkes' night but this year's affair was of a harmless character, plenty of noise being the chief characteristic. Fireworks galore were discharged and the Market Hill was occasionally lit up with flame-coloured flares. But this was rather a tame sort of amusement for undergraduates and they proceeded to accomplish the now stale feat of extinguishing the gas lamps in the neighbourhood of the Hill. Some undergrads took it into their heads to relight the lamps in the centre, which enabled one of their number to climb the fountain on the top of which something indistinguishable was placed. This being done out went the lamps again, coins being the smashing factor once more 25 11 06

1925 11 06

Two fires caused damage to the extent of thousands of pounds in Cambridge and both are believed to have been caused by fireworks. It was particularly unfortunate that one occurred a few moments after the other, for the second was a much bigger conflagration than the first, and the fire engine was not then available. The first was to a corn stack in Natal Road but the other was at Messrs Kidman & Sons' wood factory yard and workshops in Abbey Walk. The outbreak occurred at the end of the building nearest the Coldham's Common allotments, but it quickly spread along the rafters and within ten minutes there was no earthly chance of saving the building. The roof of St Columba's Mission Hall was soon alight and the outskirts of Simper's rope works also began to blaze 25 11 06

1929 11 06

Nearly thirty arrests were made during a Guy Fawkes 'Rag' on Cambridge Market Hill. Early in the evening an attempt was made to light a bonfire in Petty Cury and there was a considerable blaze in front of Falcon Yard before the police noticed it and it was extinguished. In Rose Crescent an effigy was soaked with petrol, stuffed with fireworks and deposited near the Market Hill end. This was quickly extinguished and the effigy confiscated, but the petrol continued to burn for a long time afterwards. A new feature of the scrimmages was the use of police whistles by undergraduates which added to the confusion. 29 11 06

1929 11 07

A sheep farmer, who became annoyed on Guy Fawkes Night at being mistaken for an undergraduate, was summonsed for assaulting the Senior Proctor, Mr Frederick Dykes. He testified that he had been with his constables when he sent one after an undergraduate who attempted to evade him. He then heard a shout of 'Get the Proctor' and felt two blows on his head. One of his constables seized the man now in the dock. Defendant said he was a stranger to Cambridge and had been told that if he followed the proctors round he would see some fun. He was not dressed like an undergraduate. He was fined £3. 29 11 07

1930 11 06

Cambridge police had cold feet with waiting for something to turn up in a temperature several degrees under freezing point. But the dreaded 'Fifth', that traditional battle between University and police failed to explode in the time-honoured fashion. There was a constant bombardment on the outskirts of town and some spasmodic firework throwing on the market where smoke screens were used to some effect. Using the cloud as cover two lamps were extinguished under the very nose of a sergeant. There were a few arrests but no helmets were knocked off. 30 11 06b

1933 11 06

Bonfire night demonstration & Hitler Nazi meeting – 33 11 06

1934 11 06

Cambridge saw one of the most riotous celebrations of the 'Fifth' for many years. In the course of demonstrations around Market Hill nearly 40 arrests were made, many of the police lost their helmets,

several more had their tunics ripped right down the back and not a few sustained split knuckles and bruises. When supplies of fireworks began to run low parties of undergraduates attempted to put out every light but carried their efforts too far and smashed the glass of two shop windows and the traffic signal at the top of Petty Cury. There were 35 defendants including seven for assaults on the police, three for resisting the police a number for obstructing the police. Other summonses were for extinguishing street lamps and throwing fireworks. A Trinity undergraduate was fined for 'tipping' a policeman's helmet. Several times during the hearing there were outbursts of laughter. 36 11 06, 34 11 06a & b [1.1]

1935 11 06

Guy Fawkes – traditional rag, few arrests – 35 11 06b

1936 11 06

Guy Fawkes Night disorder, truncheon charges, riotous scenes – court case – 36 11 06

1937 11 06

The treat of severe action had a salutary effect on Cambridge undergraduates during the 'Fifth' celebrations. Last year a number of students were rusticated and others heavily fined by Borough justices. The Gas Company surrounded their lamp posts with barbed wire and fitted specially toughened glass over the actual light. Although a number of the taller standards were clambered up in every case the mountaineers had to return baffled. Not a light was extinguished. However two bus windows were broken with bricks and a pane of glass in a telephone kiosk was smashed. Photographers who used flashlights to take pictures had to retire in face of a barrage of missiles. Police arrested a woman but no serious attempt was made to rescue her. 37 11 06

1939 11 01

Rev E.M. Tweed was at The Perse 1884-87 under Rev John Wisken; played in football team; then to St Catharine's and 'coached' while undergraduate. Guy Fawkes day memories & proctors 39 11 01

1943 11 01

Cambridge Corn Exchange venue for Barn Dance staged by American Red Cross for US forces' celebration of traditional American custom of Hallowe'en ... at one end a Guy Fawkes surrounded by straw ... dances consisted slow foxtrots and quicksteps to the famous American Flying Eagles band. Were crates of apples and pears from which the many dancers, numbering about 1,800 were at liberty to help themselves. Refreshments served free of charge by an American clubmobile – a canteen on wheelers – about 3,000 American doughnuts, 25 gallons of coffee and 30 gallons of cider, beside orange and lemonade. Pumpkins cut into faces grotesquely illuminated by candles ... 43 11 01

1944

November 5th falls on Sunday, plans for Rag opposed [1.9]

1944 11 08

Bonfire Night rag protests – 44 11 08 & a, b

1947 11 06

Six undergraduates and two RAF men were arrested during the usual Guy Fawkes Night scenes in the centre of Cambridge last night. From 7.30 crowds grew steadily on Market Hill. Fireworks were discharged freely and the din reached its peak between eight and half-past. Members of the University who earlier had been outnumbered by more than ten to one were in force by nine o'clock, several minor scuffles occurred about this time, and the first of several policemen's helmets disappeared. Proctors and their "bulldogs" early kept undergraduates on the move. After that the crowd gradually thinned away, and by 1.15 there were only groups here and there c47 11 06

1948 11 06

Hand grenade thrown at Senate House on November 5th, damages glass [2.16,1.11]

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1948 11 06

Cambridge's annual Guy Fawke's battle was waged in the market square and surrounding streets . Five undergraduates were amongst those who were arrested and placed in the Guildhall cells until being bailed. There were three charges of assaulting the police. Though a strong warning had been given by the university authorities there was considerable rowdyism. RAF men from nearby airfields and US service personnel were banned from Cambridge for the night. Ten people were taken to Addenbrooke's hospital having received slight injuries or fainted in the large crowds 48 11 06

1949 11 07

The quietest Guy Fawkes night "rag" long-service Cambridge police officers can remember passed off without even a street lamp being extinguished – another "within living memory" record. A crowd gathered on the Market Square by 7pm and fireworks were thrown. A police car which arrived on the scene radioed for reinforcements. These shepherded the crowd off the square. After that police posted at the entrances to the square prevented people entering the area. Early in the evening a few rotten eggs were thrown, and a smoke bomb exploded in the Sidney Street area. These incidents, and the intermittent throwing of fireworks, constituted about the only "excitement" of the evening, though there was an occasion when a "bulldog" pursued a man at full speed in front of the Guildhall 49 11 07

1950 11 06

Although four arrests – three townsmen and one undergraduate – were made, Guy Fawkes night this year was about the quietest since the war. Undergraduates were not as lively as in years past. The reason for the lack of activity on their part was probably the fact that they had been warned verbally by their tutors. Just to make sure seven watchful Proctors with their top-hatted 'bulldogs' maintained a constant patrol of the main streets 50 11 06

1954 11 06

Police helmets will be treasured possession in the homes of undergraduates and Cambridge 'Teddy-Boys' who contributed to the Guy Fawkes Night high jinks. One police constable, helmet-less, went back to base for another. But in double-quick time this went too! Frequent clashes broke out between police and revellers. In Market Square a crowd of more than 5,000 screamed, shouted, pushed and laughed but it was 'good natured fooling'. "Teddy" girls screamed at each bang, unsuspecting undergraduates were pounced on by Proctors and 'Bulldogs' and there were boos and hisses each time an untidy-looking urchin was led away, and each time the urchin would protest his innocence of throwing any fireworks.

1959 11 06

Roughest November 5th for 20 years, banger battles on Market Hill, £200 damage caused (6.11.59)
59 11 06g

1961 07 12

A new car park attendant's hut has been installed on Cambridge Market Square. The original hut was badly damaged by fire during the Guy Fawkes celebrations two years ago and replaced by a temporary one. It is expected to be in use later this week 61 07 12

1961 10 31

Undergraduates have been banned from the centre of Cambridge on Guy Fawkes Day. This will enable police to control the danger from homemade fireworks which have caused injuries to innocent bystanders A similar ban last year made it the quietest for many years 61 10 31

1962 11 06

Bonfire Night was very quiet this year. Police appeals for people to stay away from the city centre met with a good response and the streets were almost empty. Extensive use was made of radios and police with walkie-talkie sets moved on any groups from street corners. A University ban on students entering the city centre during the five hours before midnight was equally effective. Major incidents

were few and far between and the elaborate measures taken proved more than adequate on one of the quietest Guy Fawkes nights for many years 62 11 06

1972 11 06

A firework, probably a rocket from a Guy Fawkes party, is thought to have caused a fire which almost burned out a historic 18th century thatched cottage at Landbeach. The cottage, built in the 1760s by the then Rector, had been unoccupied for the last three years. Fireworks were also believed to have started a fire which badly damaged an old wooden barn used by Bar Hill junior school as a storeroom. Almost the whole of the 2,000 sq. ft. building, part of the original Bar Hill Farm and one of the new village's oldest buildings, was destroyed

1973 11 06

6,000 people turned out to support the second firework spectacular presented by Cambridge Round Table at Cambridge United's Football ground. Hundreds of children were amongst the spectators to watch the £400 firework display. A variety of set pieces, most of which largely featured Catherine wheels won plenty of admiration. But for many sitting high in the terraces the displays of rocket fireworks were unseen and wasted, obscured by the covered stands. Bonfire night in Cambridge was one of the quietest for many years. The Fire Brigade had only one call - and that was a false alarm

c.36.95 – Poppy Day & Rag

1921

Rags seemed to have reached climax after WWI, by 1920 "a new kind of misdirected energy, originality & daring is being poured into organising elaborate stunts, hoaxes & escapades; Michaelmas 1921 was great term for rags : Senate opened academic year by debating granting degrees for women; became political issue; first rag of burning gates of Newnham, then on voting day a colossal mock funeral for 'The death of the Varsity' with corpse of last male under-graduate being borne on a bier surrounded by aged mourners whose long grey beards dragged in dust; Armistice Day heralded by great Gun Day when German gun removed from Jesus college

1921 11

First Poppy Day collection made on 26 November passed smoothly (not done by undergrads); undergrads asked that this collection be organised entirely by their committee & take full responsibility that no incidents 62 11 08 [38]

1922 11 13

If the Cambridge undergraduate can find any excuse for a "rag" he invariably organises a more or less elaborate affair. Yesterday's "circus" was a rag that everybody could enjoy; it did no harm to anybody and above all as a result of its labours aided Lord Haig's fund - "Poppy Day" - to the extent of £115 or thereabouts. The circus was a screamingly funny affair and brought everyone to doorways, windows and, in some cases, roof tops. The signal for the two minutes Armistice silence was heard in Downing-street and immediately the procession pulled up. The two minutes over pandemonium started as suddenly as it had ceased 22 11 13

1923

Main feature of Rag was match between two ludicrously dressed football teams; Guy Fawkes incidents became less violent & Senate decreed it no longer necessary for University lodging houses to have ground floor shutters as protection against bonfires 62 11 08 [38]

1923 11 10

The red poppy of Remembrance was everywhere in Cambridge today. Every buttonhole, every bicycle, and every motor car bore visible tribute to those who died that England might live. Everywhere were busy undergraduates smiling and pushing their business and selling red silk poppies in aid of the Earl Haig's Fund for ex-servicemen and their dependants. The average undergraduate

loves to be “up and doing” and any way he can use his superfluous energy for a good cause appeals to him. In accordance with their usual custom the memorial at the General Post Office was decorated with a huge wreath of laurels and poppies 23 11 10

A merry and light-hearted party of undergraduates, despite police vigilance, succeeded in obtaining their hearts desire - they manage to light a fire on market Hill. Certain of the undergraduate community attracted the attention of some constables to a gas lamp on the one corner of the square. They demonstrated a desire to figure on the charge sheet of the police court by the charmingly simple process of putting out the light. The police “fell for it” and kept watch on that particular part of the market place. Meanwhile another body of the faithful rushed on to the Market Hill with a rowing eight filled with petrol and had it alight before people realised what was towards. 23 11 10

1923 11 19

The Cambridge undergraduates have once more been the source of innocent amusement. The "rag" consisted in the purchase of one of the old 4- wheeled tram cars that used in bygone days to be both a convenience and an adornment to the streets of Cambridge. On Saturday when it was expected that the tram would be towed in state through Cambridge streets the authorities were alarmed by the appearance of numbers undergraduates outside the yard where the tram was stored. At this moment another tram made its appearance, a tram of Lilliputian dimensions, towed with steady ropes by a happy band of undergraduates. The miniature car was solemnly dragged into the centre of town and along old tram lines, which have for many years or so useless a feature in King's Parade. 23 11 19

1924

Trails of pennies at Rag 62 11 08 [38]

1924 11 09

Cambridge undergraduates were busy today selling poppies. They were stationed in the centre of the town and in all the main thoroughfares leading thereto. Among their number were several very persistent in their efforts and “held-up” anybody – pedestrian, cyclist or motorist – who was not wearing a poppy. By way of pushing business a group of undergraduates hired a donkey and barrow, attired themselves as costers – complete with “pearlies” and other effects and went around the town rattling money boxes 24 11 09

1925 11

Undergraduates take over sale of poppies 62 11 08 [38]

1925 11 11

With commendable solemnity Cambridge honoured England's dead. Never before was the Two Minutes Silence so well observed in the busy parts of the town, a striking testimony to the increasing reverence which is attached to this impressive ceremony. Many wore their poppies as an outward sign of their remembrance and heads were reverently bared as the first maroon boomed forth from Parker's Piece. Except for a few instances of chronic forgetfulness or callous disregard the silence was complete

1925 11 14

“We the undersigned, convinced that all disputes between nations are capable of settlement by diplomatic negotiation, hereby solemnly declare that we shall refuse to support or render war service to any Government which resorts to arms”. The declaration having been signed by members of the University they called a public meeting. The hall was nearly filled with undergraduates but a section of the audience showed their displeasure by continual interruption. Mr G.L. Trevelyan spoke of the horrors to be met in the next war, and was greeted with the remark: “No they will kill us nice and cleanly in the next war”.

1926 11

“Scrum” rag one of wildest since war, 52 arrests, 100 in fines (11.26)

Please make what use of this you may. Kindly remember where it came from – www.mikepetty.org.uk

1926 11 11

For two minutes Cambridge stood still in silent homage to the glorious dead. Everywhere the Great Silence was religiously observed. As the hour approached a general atmosphere of expectancy enveloped the whole town until just before the great moment arrived a significant hush seemed to fall, and those in the street trod softly in fear unless they should disturb the slumbers of the sacred dead. As the bells of the Catholic church struck the hour a faint boom followed by a reverberating explosion from the direction of Parker's Piece announced that the fateful two minutes had arrived, and traffic and pedestrians came to a simultaneous standstill.

1927 11 11

Poppies! They were everywhere. The streets of Cambridge were ablaze with them. They were on every coat, in every conscience. Their spirit turned the town into a red riot of remembrance. As the day wore on the poppies grew thicker. A great army of 2,000 undergraduates sold the emblems with an enthusiasm which was unbounded. Early in the morning they were at their posts with their trays of flowers and collecting boxes and all through the day carried on their merry money hunt. Many played the role of highwaymen, boarding buses and holding up the traffic.

1928 11 10

Soon after daybreak the advance guard of the thousand undergraduate poppy sellers sallied forth to all quarters of Cambridge, determined to beat the record figures reached last year. The warmth of their enthusiasm was sufficient protection against the keen frosty air, and scorning overcoats they patrolled the lonely streets and waylaid those hurrying to business. They were so cheerfully importunate that only a modern Scrooge could have refused them and most people seemed only too willing to pay off another small instalment of their war debt.

1928 11 10 c

Carnival conditions prevailed in Cambridge where the poppy-decked shoppers met amusing spectacles on all hands. On no previous poppy day has undergraduate ingenuity been so fertile. Chief among the many attractive schemes for money squeezing was "Banger's Circus" in which an unidentifiable animal with 'flannel bag' legs, and a monkey led on a chain by a top-hatted ringmaster were noticeable. The procession was disorganised when the monkey developed a thirst and dashed into the Angel, dragging the not-unwilling circus master with him

1929 11 14

Rag case, p5

1930 11 11

Reverently Cambridge stood and remembered its dead. The firing of the maroon was the signal for silence. Immediately life stood still, pedestrians stopped dead in their tracks and in homes, offices and workshops men and women stood to attention. But in one part of town their silence was jarred by the thoughtlessness of a motor driver who did not stop. 30 11 11b-d

1930 11 11

Poppy Day rag – 30 11 11e-g

1933 11 10

The film 'Our Fighting Navy' has been withdrawn from the Tivoli Cinema following lively scenes. Fifty members of the Students' Anti-War went to make a protest but a rival party, numbering about a thousand undergraduates, marched to the cinema with two bands playing war-time songs and carrying Union Jacks. Several tried to push their way in until the arrival of four policemen who, with drawn truncheons, managed to keep the crowd at bay whilst a dozen more raced to the scene in motor vehicles. Cries of 'Down with Hitler' and 'Hail Hitler' were heard above the general uproar and a stink bomb let off in the vestibule. 33 11 10

1931 11 13

The Poppy Day collection in Cambridge has again smashed all records with undergraduate collectors struggling with money still coming in. Nearly two tons of coppers have passed through their hands. Early in the day the stock of poppies was exhausted and a fresh supply had to be brought in by train. Market Hill was the scene of half-a-dozen well organised 'rags' and at Silver Street the Demon Diver jumped in flames into the river and the collectors drew in good sums for his 'widow' and 'children' 31 11 13 I & j

1934 11 10

Poppy Day collectors had to contend with a dismal downpour of rain. But a large crowd gathered on Senate House Hill to await the arrival of a self-styled 'Hitler' who was due to open the Caius Fun Fair. When he did come, by car, he brought a procession of about a dozen cars in his wake, all containing weird and wonderful characters. The obstinate mule, which last year lay down in the road and refused to get up until tempted by a coin, was less obstinate on the present occasion, for the wet and muddy road was hardly a pleasant bed. 34 11 10 & a

1935 11 11

The Two Minutes' Silence was observed. Life was paralysed and sound was stilled. A crowd of several hundreds gathered on Cambridge Market Hill, waiting. At two minutes to the hour a clock in the vicinity struck and a whistle blew on the Guildhall demolition site and the Silence began. Buses, cars, carts, cycles and pedestrians were perfectly still. When what was actually the first maroon went off at eleven the crowd mistook it for the second and during what should have been the Silence the ordinary bustle recommenced. The second maroon took everyone by surprise with the exception of the few who had realised the mistake and remained still. 35 11 11

1938 11 11

Undergraduates invaded the streets, skilfully extracting all the spare coppers with various ingenious stunts. In white sweaters and kilts of many clans the University Pipe Band paraded to Market Square for a display of Highland dancing, then toured public houses. The 'Peace Group' were perched on a cart disguised as a camouflaged tank decorated with "Atlee's pants" – which appeared to be pale pink in colour. Standing on the tank were two dictatorial-looking figures in uniform. Amongst the individual performers was a man on a pair of stilts made from skulls while barrel-organ players were dressed as ghosts 38 11 11

1939 11 11

Set against the tragic background of a new war, Poppy Day in Cambridge presented a much more subdued scene. The war-wrought necessity of avoiding large gatherings of crowds and the blocking of streets considerably curtailed the undergraduates' carnival-light activity. Decorated vehicles had been banned. The German Chancellor was the favourite target for shafts of wit and the Cosmopolitan Cinema advertising vehicles offered an invitation to 'Beat up Hitler' by piercing a pip with a dart. 39 11 11a

1939 12 01

Poppy Day total is now £2,328 14s. The exceptional circumstances last year produced a sum of about £2,819, but the 1939 total is already near the £2,382 collected in 1937 and the £2,452 collected in 1936. Pembroke heads the list of individual college collections with a sum of £223 - £80 more than the runner-up, Christ's. 39 12 01 CIPOf

1940 11 15

Remembrance Day. At the express invitation of the Mayor (Ald. E. O. Brown) members of the County Council accompanied the Council and Corporation to the annual service of Remembrance and Dedication at Gt. St. Mary's Church on Sunday. The Lord Lieutenant and Mrs. Adeane, members of the British Legion, headed by their band, under Mr. W. Cant, representatives of other ex-Servicemen's organisations, the police and members of the A.F.S., the Boys' Brigade and a contingent from the St. John's Ambulance were also present. After the service, wreaths were laid on the War Memorial by the

British Legion and the Borough Division of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, as well as by the Mayor.
40 11 15

1945 11 06

First peacetime 'Fifth' rag, street lights extinguished, attack on 'Bull', Regal stormed – CDN 1945 11 06

1945 11 12

Armistice day march – 45 11 12

1947 11 08

Poppy Day rag, p5

1947 11 10

Cambridge's Remembrance Parade, 300 strong, which yesterday honoured the fallen in church and at the War Memorial, was the biggest muster for several years. Big crowds lined the streets as the parade marched to Holy Trinity for the British Legion's annual Service of Remembrance, and as later it made its way to the War Memorial, where wreaths were laid.

1948 11 15

It really was women's day at the university Senate House on Saturday. Following the Queen's visit last month came the first historic degree ceremony to include women graduates. Previously they had held only the title of their degrees but now a decree has been passed admitting them to full membership they can proceed in person to take them. 114 were conferred in all. The recipients included a number who had left the colleges many years go - two from Girton had graduated in the 1890s. Side by side with them were young women who had graduated last year. All were enjoying the first fruits of a successful outcome of a struggle that had lasted 70 years

1949 11 07

The quietest Guy Fawkes night "rag" long-service Cambridge police officers can remember passed off without even a street lamp being extinguished – another "within living memory" record. A crowd gathered on the Market Square by 7pm and fireworks were thrown. A police car which arrived on the scene radioed for reinforcements. These shepherded the crowd off the square. After that police posted at the entrances to the square prevented people entering the area. Early in the evening a few rotten eggs were thrown, and a smoke bomb exploded in the Sidney Street area. These incidents, and the intermittent throwing of fireworks, constituted about the only "excitement" of the evening, though there was an occasion when a "bulldog" pursued a man at full speed in front of the Guildhall.

1950 11 06

Although four arrests – three townsmen and one undergraduate – were made, Guy Fawkes Night this year was about the quietest since the war. Undergraduates were not as lively as in years past. The reason for the lack of activity on their part was probably the fact that they had been warned verbally by their tutors. Just to make sure seven watchful Proctors with their top-hatted 'bulldogs' maintained a constant patrol of the main streets

1950 11 11

In the main streets of Cambridge today it looked as though a zoo, a circus, a host of foreign invaders and history's immortals had been let loose – not to mention members of species hitherto unknown. It was the Poppy Day pantomime again and students were 'on the make'. Poppy sellers were on the street and some 70,000 poppies were on sale. The Mayor, Ald Taylor, was kidnapped, his hands bound with a scarf and marched out of the Guildhall into a Rolls Royce while police thoughtfully held back the crowds 50 11 11

1950 11 13

Nearly 1000 people gathered in the Guildhall for the annual Cambridge British Legion festival of remembrance. It was a most impressive sight when the 24 standard bearers entered the hall to a fanfare played by the Cambridge Band of the British Legion under its conductor, Robert Austin, dressed in their full uniform of scarlet and blue

Poppy day, p10

1951 11 10

Undergraduate collectors set out to break all previous Poppy Day collection records. The “ban” on well-known Middle East personalities made no difference to the high degree of ingenuity shown in extracting money from an ever-willing public. A seductive harem scene on a lorry featured “the Proctor” smoking surely nothing less potent than hashish while on the Magdalene college lorry a European “twist” was given by a “Don” reclining on cushions smoking a “hookah”. A collection of the weirdest Oriental gentlemen ever preceded the lorry with collecting boxes 51 11 10

1954 11 06

Police helmets will be treasured possession in the homes of undergraduates and Cambridge ‘Teddy-Boys’ who contributed to the Guy Fawkes Night high jinks. One police constable, helmet-less, went back to base for another. But in double-quick time this went too! Frequent clashes broke out between police and revellers. In Market Square a crowd of more than 5,000 screamed, shouted, pushed and laughed but it was ‘good natured fooling’. “Teddy” girls screamed at each bang, unsuspecting undergraduates were pounced on by Proctors and ‘Bulldogs’ and there were boos and hisses each time an untidy-looking urchin was led away, and each time the urchin would protest his innocence of throwing any fireworks.

1956 11 05

A Suez protest rally was held on Parker’s Piece. The back of a lorry provided a speakers’ platform and round it was ringed an audience of some 1,500 people who attempted to listen to the arguments through the constant hubbub of a group of dissenting undergraduates. They carried slogans tacked on long-handled brushes saying ‘Eden acts where U.N.O. fails’ and ‘Non-intervention is Suez-cide’. Scuffles broke out and a lone firework was lobbed on to the platform. 56 11 05a

Smoke bombs, water from upstairs windows and counter-cries from undergraduates accompanied the “Stop Eden’s War” procession organised by Cambridge Labour Party. Eighty people carrying placards set off from the Alex Wood Memorial Hall but were joined by a second, less orderly procession of undergraduates shouting “Eden Must Stay” to counter the Labour cries of “Eden Must Go”. 56 11 05b

1957 11 09

Poppy Day photos, p5 & p8

1958 11 08

Many householders opened their doors early to a young man in pyjamas or an undergraduate turbaned like a caliph and bought a poppy, then poured into Cambridge to see the fun. Every entrance was barricaded, every vehicle stopped, and toll demanded. Progress was difficult in one street because Mr John Day of Trinity was having breakfast with Miss Alexandra Hearnshaw, a Newnham mathematician, on a Belisha crossing. In Petty Cury two rival dragons occupied most of the road – a dinosaur quite 70 feet long and containing numberless undergraduates of whom only the feet were visible and a toothy monster centipede writhing from the direction of the Senate House. 58 11 08

1959 11 07

Harlequins and Columbines, spacemen and fishermen, artists, engine drivers, unmarried ‘Mummies’ (Egyptian variety), balloon vendors, winged wonders, hot dog sellers, ghouls and luscious lovelies, all filled the streets of Cambridge to collect money for the Earl Haig Fund. The City was crammed with floats, blasted with instruments and its pedestrians and traffic forced to pay tolls before being allowed to pass. One of the most sombre ‘floats’ was that lamenting the Labour Party’s third consecutive defeat at the polls. Another proclaimed “Life’s better under the Conservatives” 59 11 07 & aa

1961 11 10

Traffic was brought to an almost complete standstill in Cambridge as the Poppy Day Rag got under way and the streets became blocked with floats. Altogether 4,000 students with dustbin lids, tin cans and saucepans collected for the Earl Haig Fund. Dr Kildare performed 'bloody operations' on the streets, Trinity Hall undergraduates shaved Belisha beacons, girls from Girton dressed as blackbirds 'plucked ready for cooking' did hectic business while the 'new Hally Orchestra' gave a command performance with bicycle chains on dustbin lids and old mangles. Pedestrians found it hard to resist a forlorn and bedraggled donkey with an equally forlorn undergraduate clutching a box of soggy poppies. 61 11 10b

1962 12 03

Undergraduates seek distribute Poppy Day money more widely [25.8]

1962 11 08

Poppy Day rag history – 61 11 08

1963 11 09

Cambridge had a carnival atmosphere for the annual Poppy Day Rag. A procession of 35 gay noisy floats was the first 'organised' procession in rag history. They depicted the Great Train Robbery and the Channel Tunnel. Degrees were sold outside the Senate House, passers-by were menaced with toy guns and undergraduates scrubbed zebra crossing, delaying motorists who were surrounded by students waving collecting tins. It was claimed that The Beatles pop group had been kidnapped and would be sold in Market Square. But News Agency reports say they were returning to Liverpool by car after a tour of Ireland. 63 11 09, a,b Austin car suspended under Bridge of Sighs [12.9,21.14]

1964 11

Last Rag to support only Earl Haig fund [36]

1965 01 14

Rag Day proceeds may be used to fund a youth centre for young people who live and work here. The bankside opposite Magdalene College would be an ideal site. There are good reasons: the college buildings are now awkwardly sited in relation to town development and will always be an encumbrance in terms of planning. Townspeople have to pay higher rates because of the specially low rating allowed the colleges and industrial development has been restricted which would have provided new industries. As it is many children have to go to other towns to earn their livings. And when they reach marriageable age they have difficulty finding housing since so much land is taken up by the university.– 65 01 14a

1965 07 30

City vote not to change date Rag Day, student protest, seven colleges opt out boycott chosen charities [25.9]

1965 11 13

Rag Day quietest for years following controversy – 65 11 13, 65 11 15

1966 03 11

Rag Day: try again, split proceeds; Legion to collect on Poppy Day & undergraduates have rag week later with third to Legion; failure [25.10]

1967 11 18

Fighting local youths & students, collecting tins snatched, flop [25.11]

1968 02 08

Cambridge Rag for 1968 is axed due to rowdyism and failing enthusiasm of undergraduates – 68 02 08

1969 02 24

Rag switched to February, raise less than half, St Johns college loses £330, “such a flop people did not realise it was on” [25.13]

1969 02 08

Prince Charles crowns Rag Queen- 69 02 08b, 69 02 15a

1969 02 15

Rag Day takes new look; parades off in break with Poppy tradition; squeeze into mini car – 69 02 15

1969 02 25

Prince Charles as singing dustman in Rag revue – 69 02 25

1970

Rag profit £6,000

1971 02 22

Rag Day violence forces decorated float procession to be abandoned – 71 02 22

1972

No more Rag queens crowned 82 02 26 [36]

1973

Drop Earl Haig fund, profits slump

1974 08 12

Rag Day move to August flops, ‘enthusiasm an all-time low’, energy crisis postpones rag to November [25.14, 36]

1976 02 13

Biggest crowd decade watch parade decorated vehicles [26.1]

1977

Jubilee year boosts fund raising 82 02 36 [36]

1978 03 07

Princess Anne mobbed at Rag Charity debate on ‘Women’s place is in the harem’ [26.2]

1980

CSU take over organisation Rag

1981 06 12

Rag raises record £14,000 [26.3]

1984 03 12

Despite rain and a wicked wind Cambridge University undergraduates astonished bystanders with their Rag Day activities. Prince Edward started a sponsored crawl to Grantchester, there were parachute jumps, exhibitions of motorbike skills and a tug of war. Some students with distinguished careers ahead of them leapt from Silver Street bridge into the Cam wearing whiskers, tails and picnic plates for ears in an attempt to fly across the river. Two perplexed French visitors summed it up: “If they are so clever, how can they be so stupid?” 84 03 12 p7

1985 01 24

Rag team bid to heal 12-year rift, 'spirit of 60s when town & gown united' [26.4] "things started to go sour in the mid-60s when politically-aware students started griping at allocation money, break from Poppy Day marked point at which town lost sympathy, less tolerant of flour bombs, rotten tomatoes, water pistols & eggs; even in jubilee year was systematic hooliganism ... [37]

1985 03 11

Cambridge's student prince, Prince Edward, has helped to make this year's Rag Week a record-breaker. His appearance in the Rag Revue made the show a sell-out and he is guest-of-honour at the first Charity Ball where the raffle winner will lead off the first waltz with the fair-haired prince. Other rag events included mud wrestling, birdmen leaping from Silver Street Bridge and silly sports such as a tug-of-war across the river and an egg-throwing competition. It ended with punt-jousting and a mixed three-legged rugby match. 85 03 11b

c.36.96 : Mock Funerals

1899 02 17

Yesterday afternoon the attention was attracted by what seemed to be an imposing funeral procession. But this was no ordinary funeral for instead of the usual hearse an open landau led the way and this was occupied by three young men who wore "the trappings of woe" very lightly. Following were nearly a score of hansoms. It is alleged that at the end of last term a student of Queens' college "ragged" a couple of Freshmen's rooms. The matter was reported to the University authorities who came to the conclusion he should be sent down for a year. His friends resolved to show their disapproval. Before the train left the company whistled the "Dead March" and it left amid ringing cheers 1899 02 17

1899 11 02

When residents in St Andrew's street, Cambridge, saw a procession of cabs passing onward "all mournful and slow" to the railway station the people knew that someone had been sent down from the University. From Emmanuel College a youth emerged and under a shower of rice made hurriedly for the cab waiting at the door. The driver, "Gentleman Joe" wore a tall hat draped with crape, and so did the drivers of some four cabs what followed. The hero of the hour entered the Great Northern Station, the train moving out to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne". Meanwhile the cabbies grove back to their respective stands. They were of more cheerful aspect on the return journey and each puffed a festive cigar 1899 11 02

1904 03 15

St John's College students carried out a mock funeral for an undergraduate who was ejected from the New Theatre on three occasions in one week for having infringed the rules adopted to preserve order. The college authorities decided he should be 'sent down' and his friends showed organised a process of 13 cabs which filed along the streets at funeral pace to the railway station. A halt was made outside the New Theatre to allow the travellers to indicate their disapproval of the management. During the whole journey shouts, singing and the blowing of horns was continuous. 04 03 15

1907 11 26

A 'mock funeral' saw a procession of 100 cabs boarded by undergraduates who scrambled to the roof of the vehicles for the journey to the railway station. The cabbies had decorated their whips with pieces of crepe and 'mourners' with mouth organs and a miniature bagpipes played hideous music. The 'deceased' was 'sent down' for being out of Caius College after midnight – he had gone to London but his car had broken down. 07 11 26

1910 06 17

One of the biggest mock funerals for many years resulted as a difference of opinion between the authorities of Emmanuel and several junior members of the college as to the proper conduct of a

‘bump supper’ after which they had lit a bonfire on the lawn in the front court. Some ten undergraduates in their third year were rusticated for a week. A string of hansom cabs appeared at the gates, the ‘corpses’ clambered on to the roofs and mourners in evening dress and wearing old silk hats swathed with crape accompanied them to the station. Includes members of CUOTC in uniform with rifles reversed - thought to be bad form so soon after King’s funeral 10 06 17a

1911 03 10

“Mock funeral” held when Trinity Hall undergraduate sent down for disciplinary offence, 100 horse & motor vehicles in procession with brass band on coal wagon leading. At the head of the funeral procession was a hansom. Seats on the top with legs dangling over the side, was the undertaker. His mournful calling seemed to have cast a settled gloom over his countenance. His eyes were mournful and sad, and his clothing was of the deepest black, save for his socks (he wore no shoes), which were of the brightest scarlet. In his hand he waved a long whip (an emblem of his mournful trade), with a bright handkerchief to match his wonderful socks tied to it. Behind the hearse were nine carriages filled with loudly lamenting mourners – extract from a report of a ‘Mock Funeral’ for an undergraduate sent down from university 11 03 10b

1911 05 19

In a little side passage in King Street a barrel organ was draped with black and mauve as hansoms, taxis and growlers arrived in their dozens. The coffin was covered with crepe surmounted by cap and gown while plumes barely concealed the lines of an express delivery van in which sat the ‘corpse’ smartly dressed in grey suit and felt bowler. There were about 100 horses and motor vehicles in the procession to the station where the tops of the railway carriages were filled with figures clad in varying garb from pyjamas and rowing shorts to mourning suits and dress suits. It was the most imposing mock funeral ever seen in Cambridge 11 05 19d & e

1912 03 08

A mock funeral started from the “corpse’s” lodging in Lensfield Road. There was a long line of taxis, hansoms and even four-wheelers stretching some distance down Trumpington Street. There was no elaborate “hearse” as in previous funerals: the body was placed quite simply in a hansom bearing the words “Alas! My poor brother” and smoked cigars throughout. His “cabby’s” hat was draped with crepe while the majority of the fancifully-dressed mourned wore complimentary black-eyes out of respect for the ‘deceased’. There were an extraordinary number of “flappers” – quite stunning flappers some of them were too. One of the best was a suffragette and Mrs Pankhurst also figured in the procession. 12 03 08

1913 02 14

An unusual feature of the Mock Funeral (of an undergraduate ‘sent down’ from college) was a miniature coffin borne by a Chinaman. It was, like the ‘corpse’ completely hidden in the ‘hearse’, for the hansom was covered by men who seemed to cling to it as bees swarm on a tree. The procession was preceded by a two-seater car driven by an old fellow with a red beard and enormous straw hat sitting beside his ‘spouse’, a lady with a high complexion, a shawl alone betraying her age. The ‘cortege’ numbered nearly 50 vehicles including a ‘flapper’ riding a bicycle meant for three men. Her green hobble skirt was not as demurely worn as are the dresses of typical Cambridge girls. 13 02 14 p10 CIP

1920 03 03

Mock Funeral of Caius man, first for six years – a solitary conveyance does not give impression that there is much enthusiasm for this form of demonstration nowadays. – Ch 20 03 03d; photo – Ch 20 03 10a CDN 20 03 01

1921 10 26

University votes against women’s degrees; undergraduate mock funeral – photos – 21 10 26b

1926 05 03

Cambridge had a Mock Funeral today, after a lapse of many years. Undergraduates, dressed in outrageous attire, paraded the streets of the town and marched to the station to observe "funeral obsequies" to two Trinity men who have been sent down for a breach of college discipline. The procession made its way to the college to collect the "corpses". On arrival however they found their unfortunate colleagues had made use of their newly-acquired wings and flown, but nothing daunted the party proceeded to the station headed by a drum-major and a figure in clerical attire. Amongst the occupants of the horse-drawn 'hearse' were two musical geniuses with a banjo and saxophone 26 05 03

1930 05 26

A mock funeral procession paraded through Cambridge as undergraduates bade farewell to one of their number who had been sent down. It was headed by an old horse-drawn landau in which the 'corpse' sat, his face disguised beneath a war-paint of lipstick. He was joined by various persons who were to officiate at the ceremony; beneath top hats, black cloches and wideawakes were suits of grey flannel, blazers and plus-fours. All were garnished in crepe streamers on which hung rhubarb, beer and wine bottles, remains of the 'wake'. At the station the funereal party moved along the platform hilariously singing a dirge and the 'corpse' was installed in a third-class compartment where gifts of fruit and rhubarb were handed solemnly in. 30 05 26

1931 02 27

Over 100 attended a funeral service for a young Freshman whose mysterious death has caused such a sensation throughout the country. Press and public were excluded but a crowd gathered and police had some difficulty in controlling the traffic. He had been found lying dead on the floor of his room, gagged and bound in an elaborate manner with numerous handkerchiefs, a length of puttee, and a wire flex. Members of the Pentacle Club, the University Magicians' Society have been interrogated & Sir Bernard Spilsbury, the famous Home Office pathologist has been called in. 31 02 27d-g-h

1962 10 16

A 'mock funeral' was held for two undergraduates, Philip Gurden of Magdalene and Simon Keswick of Trinity, who were sent down for failing their exams. Their 'coffin' was carried on a sports car while in the 'cortege' at the rear was Prince William of Gloucester who is at Magdalene College 62 10 16 [446.9.6]

c.36.97 : May Week

1899 06 08

The gaieties of the May Term have today been enhanced by the appearance of the Australian cricketers. Last night famous Grassy and Ditton Paddock were the scene of brilliant assemblages of beauty and fashion. Cambridge is full for the Eights week and looking at her best. The fair sex - a mighty host - seem to be arrayed in their most killing attire. Almost everybody - who is anybody - seems to have got his people "up", and everybody's people appear resolutely determined to enjoy themselves - 1899 06 08

1901 06 12

On the occasion of the annual ball the precincts of picturesque Clare College were lavishly illuminated and decorated. The centre path of the court was covered in and carpeted; palms were placed in groups on the lawn and the whole court made brilliant with hundreds of fairy lamps and Chinese lanterns. Rows of fairy lamps along the river side gave the garden a particularly beautiful appearance. Dancing took place in the hall and the combination room. There were 21 dances on the programme and three supper dances. Supper was set in the reading room 01 06 12

1904 06 11

During 'May' Week the permanent part of the population takes much coin of the realm from the floating part but this year visitors seemed likely to be well down because of the weather. Then on Thursday sunbeams brought a large number of visitors bringing with them awe-inspiring loads of

luggage. Airy dresses of muslin and chiffon and a boating excursion are inseparable to the feminine. They were very comfortable during the all-too-brief spell of sunshine but then the ladies grew colder and colder until in desperation they gratefully accepted loans of jackets and even overcoats from their male escorts. Thus the racing was not as picturesque as it might have been. 1904 06 11

1904 07 02

Few realise the lavish expenditure on the May Balls held in Cambridge Corn Exchange. After the corn merchants have vacated the building on the Saturday evening a small army of workmen take possession. They labour until midnight when the advent of the Sabbath and the strict rules governing municipal buildings shut them out for 24 hours. With the first hour of Monday morning they re-enter and by eight that evening the place is transformed into an artistic ballroom through which not a vestige of the prosaic Corn Exchange is seen. What of the cost? There is not less than £2,000 worth of goods in the ball room; add to that the cost of utilising the Guildhall as a supper room and include the china and plates for the supper and you have a total of some thousands of pounds to provide our moneyed visitors with an evening's entertainment. CDN 2.7.1904

1906 06 09

Cambridge has surrendered to May Week visitors very completely. These pretty butterflies, who transform our mundane streets into kaleidoscope scenes of colour and animation, mean increased profit for the tradesman and are a source of joy to the lodging-house keeper. They must have somewhere to lay their heads, dainty dinners and mayonnaise for supper. They cause money to circulate and many is the summer holiday they provide for the householders who provide rooms for their comfort. 06 06 09b

1909 06 11

Record number of May Week visitors – 09 06 11

1910 06 17

Saturday's bump suppers proved exceptionally popular. It is customary for bonfires to be held in college courts and the frequent discharge of fireworks kept the fun flowing until the early hours. Jesus, who retained their position as head of the river, held a magnificent bonfire on the Close. A large crowd attracted by an enormous pile of old boxes dumped near the tennis courts, assembled in anticipation of fun before the pile was set ablaze by firing Roman candles into the heart of the inflammable mass. 10 06 17

1911 06 16

May week celebrations – 11 06 16e

1913 06 06

'If you want to spend a gay week, come to Cambridge for the May Week and we'll promise lots of merriment and fun'. Cambridge May Week is now in full swing. We have long ceased to wonder at the anomaly of a May Week which comes in June and lasts a fortnight. According to the 'Onlooker' it was in the year 1882 that the May Races, around which all the festivities have grown up, changed their date from May to June. But custom dies hard and people would be horrified if anyone were so bold as to suggest an alteration now 13 06 06 p7 CIP

1914 06 19

May Week will be remembered as the low-water mark in the long series of "Mays". Tradesmen unanimous that business has never been so dull. The gaiety and brightness has diminished and the number of visitors shows considerable decrease as compared with last year 14 06 19 CIPof

1919 06 11

May Week Revival Favoured with brilliant weather, without even the proverbial thunderstorm, May Week, revived in Cambridge this year with all its glory, has been one great success. The festivities have been very much as in pre-war days. There have been the usual brilliant and select functions,

including balls, college Concerts, garden parties, etc. The revival has been welcomed by University and Town people alike but the number of visitors has not been as great as had been anticipated generally 19 06 11 [3.11]

1922 06 13

"May week" has reached its second phase and the gaiety of the "Boats" has given places to a wonderful round of college balls and concerts. The May Week Ball of the First and Third Trinity Boat Clubs was probably one of the largest affairs of the kind that has ever been held in Cambridge. Hitherto, owing to a lack of accommodation the numbers attending has had to be restricted to about 650. Mr D.G. Marshall of Jesus Lane, however, found a way out of the difficulty with a somewhat novel scheme. A marquee 100 feet by 40 feet was erected on Market Hill facing the Guildhall and therein supper was laid. A delightfully cool effect was obtained by leaving open a part of the side of the tent nearest the fountain and having the fountain lit up with coloured electric lights in the background. Provision was made for some 1,100 guests and supper was served in three relays of 375 each, a special staff of chefs from the House of Commons was specially engaged for the occasion 22 06 13

1923 06 12

The opening days of the second week of the "Mays" celebrations are usually noted for the array of college balls and concerts, and this year is well in keeping with tradition. On Monday there were three of these functions, - Caius, Clare, and First and Third Trinity in addition to four concerts and a special dinner-dance at the Rendezvous, and in each case a success can be recorded. The weather had improved to such an extent that it allowed the usual outdoor part of the events to be carried out to the full, and ample sitting out accommodation provided in various courts and grounds. The largest function was at Trinity, where the attendance numbered something like 1,400 or 1,500. 23 06 12

1926 06 19

So far May Week has been a pale and melancholy ghost of its former self. What with the powerful counter-attraction of Ascot, the fact that a good many of the men have already "gone down", the restricted train service and the gloomy uncertainty of the weather, Cambridge is having a bad time just now and tradesmen, hotel and lodging-house keepers, boat-proprietors and others who look to May Week to bring a little much-needed grist to their mill have received a severe blow. Usually May Week comes before Ascot, and visitors to the Mays have been accustomed to go from Cambridge to Ascot. Now that Ascot is over there seems to be no reason which the process should not be reversed 26 06 19

1927 06 13

One of the largest crowds in memory witnessed the last of what may go down in history as the "Microphone Mays". Both banks of the Cam at Ditton presented the spectacle of an unbroken line of sightseers. There were three men up a tree at Ditton Paddock; they and their friend the microphone were telling all England what was happening and theirs was truly a romance of the tree tops. One wonders how many old Cambridge men were listening-in to a drama in which they once played a part. 27 06 13

1930 06 17

All records were broken at Trinity ball when 1,700 guests attended the most brilliant of the May Week functions. Many townspeople waited to see the guests arrive and crowds flocked to Garret Hostel Bridge to view the grounds in all their evening glory. Up to mid-day next morning occasional stragglers, heavy-eyed but cheerful could be seen walking driving about the town. One such pair were mutually photographed beside their car in Silver Street. Sports coats over white waistcoats were common and in one a dishevelled figure in a flannel dressing gown lolled at the wheel, like a character in a Edgar Wallace film. 30 06 17a

1933 06 13

Over 1,300 dancers disported themselves at the First and Third Trinity Boat Club's ball. As usual there were large crowds of spectators lining all the entrances and not a few on the river but great

precautions had been taken to avoid gate crashing with two lots of 'sentries'. Inside the place was aglow with thousands of coloured lights while the dance tent itself, with its famous parquet floor, was electrically lit. From a dais in the centre the Embassy band played a sweet programme of dance music until the early hours of the morning. 33 06 13b

1935 06 18

May Week entered its ballroom phase with the twinkle of fairy lights and the dazzle of evening frocks. The biggest ball was that arranged by the First and Third Trinity Boat Club which was attended by 1,200 people. The flood-lit bridge stood out pearly white against the shadowy outlines of college buildings and hundreds of fairy lanterns made a necklace of living fire round the lawns of the Backs while Chinese lanterns hung in the trees along with coloured light indicators which showed the number of the dance in progress. Here and there a brazier gleamed dully, spitting steam in protest against the rain which sought to dampen their fire. 35 06 18

1937 06 16

At King's college May ball over 400 guests assembled to dance and make merry. It was a pity the night was not warmer but even so quite a few ventured on the river or wandered into the darkness to admire the scene from afar. The chapel was floodlit – though not with that subtlety one might have desired – and the college hall presented a gala atmosphere, contrasting with its customary sombre appearance. There was dancing to novelties such as the 'Lambeth Walk', fox-trots like 'The Loveliness of You' and a Noel Coward waltz. 38 06 16

1939 06 13

The weather was unreasonably dull for the annual First and Third Trinity Boat Club's Ball and rain meant that the delightful after-dance wandering over the grass was only indulged by the less cautious. Most welcome were the braziers delivering heat to shivering bodies. In the blue-and-white marquee Joe Loss and his dance orchestra reigned supreme playing the 'Eton Boating Song', 'Jeepers Creepers' and other dances. There were three suppers and the dance ended at 6 o'clock with a photograph. Amongst those present were M. Swithinbank, J.C. Balfour and the Earl of Euston. 39 06 13a

1947 06 11

The revival of May Week Balls in something of their full glory brings back to Cambridge something of the spirit of gaiety and colour which we knew before the war and which is now more than ever welcomed as much by townsfolk as by members of the University. The courts of Trinity presented a fairyland-like appearance with its lantern lit cloisters which were also decorated with palms. At Clare College the dining hall was used for dancing to the melodies of Tommy Kinsman's Band from London. Cyril Stapleton and his band provided the music for dancing at Downing College 47 06 11

1949 06 14

The May Balls have brought out a crop of new evening dresses. White, ideal for a summer dance was a favourite colour and diaphanous floating tulle tell to the fore as a material. I noticed several gaily striped or checked stiff taffetas, and a few with big flower patters, but plain colours predominated. Tiered skirts – three or even four of five tiers – are back. One or two of the ladies had fringed, silk shawls, draped over their shoulders and I noticed one carrying a pink feather fan 49 06 14

1950 06 08

In the sweet perfection of a fine tuned evening on the Backs, a record crowd listened to what is surely the loveliest of all events of May Week, the programme of madrigals sung by the Cambridge University Madrigal Society from punts moored beneath King's Bridge. An audience estimated at between 7,000 and 8,000, lined both sides of the bank as the oppressive heat of the day became tempered by the cool of evening. Even the loud moo of a cow in the paddock failed to break the spell, nor did the faintly-threatening note of a high-flying bomber, reminder of the sterner world out of which the magic of the setting and the sweetness of the singing lifted the listening thousands 50 06 08

1950 06 13

The dusk-to-daylight part of Cambridge May Week festival began last night. For seven or eight hours several of the colleges put on over their grey stone a party dress of coloured lights and other decorations to welcome dancers at their May Week balls. At Downing scintillating fountains spraying sparks, gorgeous aerial cascades of magnificent colour, night turned to day by brilliant rich light, the whole punctuated by an obbligato of crackles and bangs of varying volume made up the main framework of a memorable display. There were even “flying saucers” just to show that firework-makers move with the times 50 06 13

1961 06 08

The ‘popsey expresses’ are pulling into the station and the city is fast filling up with young girls, here to watch the eights chase each other along the Cam and to dance through a succession of May Balls. There are also 20 concerts, 10 theatrical productions apart from the Footlight’s annual frolic and countless exhibitions. Once again Cambridge will take May Week in its stride. It has become used to seeing the revellers in full evening dress walking through the streets for a good day’s sleep just as we are beginning another good day’s work. 61 06 08a

1980 08 09

Cambridge May Balls are four nights of student-organised revelry which will delight some and disturb the sleep of others. This year the cost of a double ticket has peaked at £52.50 and some feel they will be pricing themselves out of existence. But the same was being said ten years ago when Jesus and Trinity were charging eleven guineas. Some tickets do go to outsiders, with adverts often placed in London papers, but the majority of ball-goers are still students. 80 06 09a

1986 05 28

A May Ball is the most glamorous, ritzy event of the year and undergraduates don’t mind paying for it. The most expensive double ticket for Peterhouse costs 125 guineas but includes dinner and free champagne all night. Trinity charges diners a more affordable £90. But the Ball everyone wants to go to is at Clare College where £220 has been paid on the black market by a couple desperate to attend. Its serene setting with the riverside gardens makes it the most romantic and Germany’s ‘Stern’ magazine is covering it. 86 05 28a

1986 05 28

St John’s College May Ball once featured the Rolling Stones and the Beatles on the same night. This year they have booked Imagination and Ruby Turner together with the Coldstream Guards and rock group The Inspirational Choir. There will be free drinks and a buffet all night long although roast swan is no longer served. The 1,700 guests include 20 from the New York banking firm Goldmann Sachs and officers from the Sultanate of Oman will also be flying in. 86 05 28b

1986 05 28

Cambridge-based chart-toppers Katrina and the Waves will be the star attraction at Trinity College May Ball while Sandie Shaw will also be returning to the college where she sang before in the swinging Sixties. Jazz and steel bands – even Scottish pipers – will play till dawn. An all-night casino, laser displays and cabaret acts will also ensure there is no time to be bored. But King’s College stopped holding May Balls in the sixties: students decided they were too expensive and not the sort of entertainment they wished to be associated with. They now hold June Events instead 86 05 28b

Bumps - Burning Winning Eight

1892 05

Last procession of boats after Bumps races, ‘sent down’ relating to men sent down for taking part in bonfire at St Johns [2.11, 3.13,22.3]

1907 06 08

The boat procession used to be the most popular of the May Week gaieties. The brilliant blazers of the collegeians, the varied colours of the ladies' charming costumes, the prettily adorned boats together with the enlivening strains of an excellent band all combined to make a scene of colour and animation. The gathering fell through owing to the apathy of the boating men who objected to dressing up to be looked at. But it is a great pity 07 06 08a

1910 06 17

Saturday's bump suppers proved exceptionally popular. It is customary for bonfires to be held in college courts and the frequent discharge of fireworks kept the fun flowing until the early hours. Jesus, who retained their position as head of the river, held a magnificent bonfire on the Close. A large crowd attracted by an enormous pile of old boxes dumped near the tennis courts, assembled in anticipation of fun before the pile was set ablaze by firing Roman candles into the heart of the inflammable mass. 10 06 17

1913 11 21

The Fire escape and engine responded to the alarm of a blaze at St John's College where they found a bonfire burning in second court to celebrate the victory of a rower in the Colquhoun Sculls. Fireworks were discharged and a crowd gathered to watch the glare through the chapel windows. Later a fire broke out in a wicker chair in an undergraduate's room. It is thought a spark from the bonfire may have blown through the window, or a lighted cigarette dropped in the chair. 13 11 21 p11 CIP

1927 06 13

Jesus College were the fastest rowers on the river and deserved to succeed in the May Races. As in other years a huge bonfire was lighted in the grounds of the college and the undergraduates celebrated the return of the Headship by dancing round the flames, shouting and singing. The "orgy" was kept up to midnight. The revels were watched by a large crowd of townspeople and some of the merry-makers engaged in good-humoured banter, amusing them with impromptu speeches. 27 06 13

1930 02 24

The successful crews in the Lent bumping races celebrated in traditional manner. Hundreds of excited undergraduates in 'bump supper' costume filled the streets till midnight and over it all flickered the light and smoke of bonfires. Boats were burned amid shouting and bacchanalian merriment at St Catharine's, Selwyn and Emmanuel who for the first time in history had finished head of the river. An 'eight' was sacrificed in the paddock of the college upon a huge pyre. The manoeuvre of getting the boat into the college proved by no means an easy one and traffic was held up as the unwieldy craft, borne on the shoulders of the crews, was shunted into Downing Street before being passed through the narrow gate. At St Catharine's the boat was escorted to the burning by a procession headed by a band of unemployed ex-Servicemen who had been playing on the towing path 30 02 24a

1934 02 26

Jesus College boat crew celebrated their Lents victory with a bonfire on the grass in front of the college and flames forty feet high dried the pavement in Victoria Avenue. An old boat helped to keep the fire going and when the supply of fuel ran short branches from trees were used. Police kept a wary eye on hoardings which might have been looked upon as sources but no raids were made. 250 paper glasses were provided to hold the beer but some preferred it straight from the bottle 34 02 26

1936 06 24

Burning the boat at Jesus College following success at Lent Race – photo – 36 02 24

1962 06 18

Queens college burn First boat May Races, first time won in college history [22.4]

1964 06 15

1st & 3rd Trinity burn boat - & fencing [22.7]

